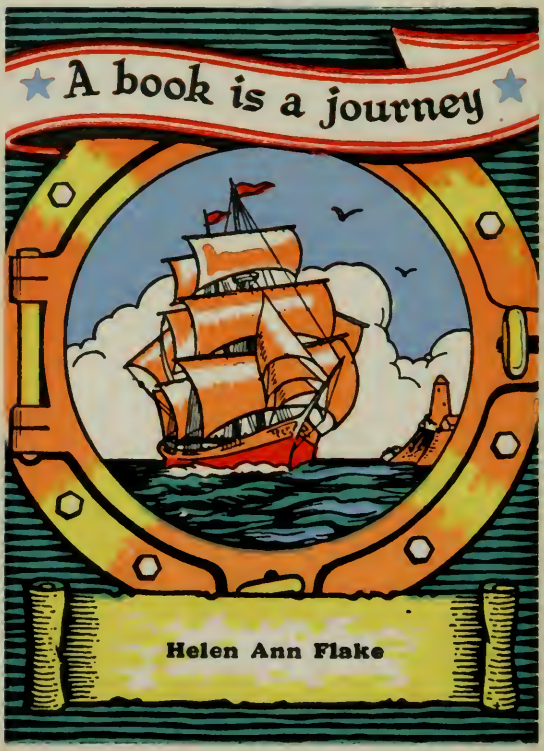
CHRISTINE

JO EPHINE AWRENCE


A book is a journey
Helen Ann Flake

WINKS HAD THE LOVELY SILVER SPANGLED SCARF AND HE SAW NO REASON FOR GIVING IT UP. (See Page 69)

"Christine" Frontispiece

CHRISTINE

BY

JOSEPHINE LAWRENCE

AUTHOR OF

ROSEMARY

ROSEMARY AND THE PRINCESS

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THELMA GOOCH

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Christine

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	Queer Feelings	1
II	Middle Names Count	9
III	It's Hard to Be a Stranger	22
IV	Let's Play Fair	33
V	Just Jane Pine	47
VI	Edith Comes to Dinner	56
VII	Thunder Storms	69
VIII	There's Always School	78
IX	An Overnight Visit	89
X	How to Catch a Burglar	101
XI	Nothing Goes Right	112
XII	Consequences	121
XIII	Practice House	130
XIV	Resourcefulness Wins	142
XV	Mothers Are Nice	153
XVI	All for Education	164
XVII	Strenuous Hours	175
XVIII	The End of an Imperfect Day	185

CHAPTER		PAGE
XIX	Confidences	195
XX	A Lucky Find	206
XXI	Lost Treasure	217
XXII	Some People Are Persistent	229
XXIII	A Real Predicament	239
XXIV	Explanations	252
XXV	Troubled Waters	263
XXVI	Ramona Gives In	275
XXVII	Straightened Out	286

CHRISTINE

CHAPTER I

QUEER FEELINGS

"GRANDMOTHERS are indulgent, and I suppose," said Christine Carpenter, "I'm spoiled."

The grandmotherly looking person who occupied the seat next to her in the parlor car, laughed a little.

"I don't think so," she assured Christine. "I've seldom found friendly folk to be what you call 'spoiled.' "

Christine shook her bobbed golden head, her warm brown eyes following the line of telegraph poles flashing past the car window.

"I only like people who are friendly, too," she confided. "And my temper is simply dreadful."

"That's bad," admitted the elderly lady who looked as if she might be a grandmother. Her

eyes twinkled behind her spectacles. "Chocolates, I've heard, sweeten the temper."

She opened the bag at her feet and took out a square white box which, opened, revealed an untouched layer of beautifully packed chocolates. Christine smiled, revealed even little white teeth. She was really lovely, this brown-eyed girl with the rose color in her cheeks matching the string of coral around her throat. She wore all brown, frock, stockings and shoes: her coat and hat, in the rack above her head, were brown, too.

The grandmotherly lady agreed with Christine that candies wrapped in tinfoil looked stunning, but often disappointed you: she liked nougats and Christine's favorites were nuts and caramels. So they ate three apiece, but slowly to make them last, and became fairly well acquainted before the box was put away.

Christine learned that Mrs. Cameron—that proved to be her name—*was* a grandmother. She had four granddaughters, one just the age of Christine, "thirteen, almost fourteen." She had been visiting a married son and was on a journey to her daughter's house. She explained

she lived half the time with the son and half with the daughter.

"That's nice," approved Christine, finishing her second chocolate with regret. "My grandma didn't have any children to live with: I lived with her instead. My father and mother died when I was a baby and Grandma took care of me."

"I know she loves you dearly," said Mrs. Cameron.

Tears came into the lovely brown eyes watching her.

"She died," Christine explained, winking rapidly. "Three months ago. I had to stay with Mrs. Shepherd—she lived next door to us—until the lawyer found me some relatives to live with."

"Bless your heart, I'm glad you have some one to love you!" exclaimed Mrs. Cameron. "Couldn't some one come after you, and not expect you to make the trip alone?"

Christine declared that the conductor was in charge of her. That Uncle Stanley had been on a trip in the west, when the lawyer wrote, and that Uncle Barry couldn't travel.

"He was hurt in the war," Christine explained,

biting into a candied cherry. "Both my uncles were in the war. They are very brave. Mr. Hunter—he's the lawyer—said they are my guardians now. I wonder what they look like."

Mrs. Cameron was surprised to hear that Christine had never seen her uncles. Most girls, she announced, knew their uncles very well and if they lived too far away to visit or be visited, there were photographs.

"They're my father's brothers," said Christine. "Grandma was my mother's mother. She never saw them, either, because they live 200 miles away from Harrington where we lived."

Mrs. Cameron put the lid on the candy box. She said she didn't think they'd better eat any more just then, and Christine agreed with her.

"The next station is mine," Mrs. Cameron asserted, placing the box in her bag. "I hope you'll like your uncles and your aunts, too, my dear."

Over her shoulder Christine, reaching up to get her new friend's coat down from the rack, looked her astonishment.

"I haven't any aunts," she cried. "Uncle Stanley isn't married, nor Uncle Barry. I have

a cousin-housekeeper, but I never heard her name."

She helped Mrs. Cameron into her coat and said good-by to her, as the train came to a stop with a grinding of wheels that seemed to shake the whole car. Mrs. Cameron kissed her impulsively and almost ran down the aisle after the porter who had taken her bag. Christine, looking through the window, saw a tall young woman and a chubby little girl rush up to the old lady and hug her tightly. It made Christine feel lonely, but she waved her hand bravely as Mrs. Cameron turned and smiled up to the window. Then slowly the long train slid out of the station and the kindly stout conductor came to tell Christine that the next stop would be Saxton, where she was to get off.

"I have to get Winks," said Christine hurriedly.

"Your dog? He'll be all right," the conductor answered. "The man in the baggage car will drop him out on the platform for you. Better let the porter take your bag now, if it's ready."

Christine put on her brown felt hat. She wondered how her uncles would look. She moved

her feet mechanically as the porter stooped to take her bag. He came back presently and brushed her off then held her coat for her. Christine thought of the cousin-housekeeper, of Winks, her merry-eyed little brown dog, of the old home in Harrington where she and dear Grandma Mace had been so happy together.

"I'm not exactly afraid," Christine told herself, whirling her chair around so that she faced the window again, "but I do certainly feel a little queer."

That, in itself, wasn't to be wondered at. To be thirteen years old, to have lived all of those thirteen years in one town and then to have to leave all the familiar faces and scenes and go, quite alone, to a distant place, the suburb of a great city; to be facing a new home and new relatives, a new school, that was a good deal for a girl to contemplate, even a girl who, like Christine, was usually looking forward to adventure and change.

Presently though, Christine forgot her queer feelings, as the train neared Saxton. A series of small towns, linked by broad boulevards and

avenues, over which a steady stream of shining cars passed, seemed to precede the main suburban station. Christine had glimpses of magnificent shade trees, large gardens, streets lined with large and small houses, before the grinding of the brakes began. The porter smiled and beckoned to her from the end of the car and she followed two ladies and a man to the platform, where the conductor waited for her.

"There's your dog, and he's glad to see you," commented the conductor, helping her carefully down the steps.

Blessed little Winks was leaping about at the end of his strap and the grinning baggage man surrendered him to Christine with ill-concealed relief. The sight of the dog's ungainly wiry body, his faithful eyes and frantically wagging tail, comforted Christine strangely. Heedless of her clothes, she knelt on the cement floor of the platform and hugged Winks, while he put his paws on her shoulder and barked himself hoarse. Neither noticed the conductor speaking to a tall slim man, young-looking in spite of his

gray hair, till Christine felt a hand on her shoulder.

"Here's your uncle, Miss, and as you're all right, I can leave you," said the conductor gravely.

Christine scrambled to her feet and shook hands with him.

"Thank you for taking care of me," she said sincerely.

"Shake hands with me, too," commanded the gray-haired man as the conductor swung himself aboard the already moving train. "I'm your Uncle Stanley."

CHAPTER II

MIDDLE NAMES COUNT

SEATED in the front seat of the sedan, beside her uncle, Christine studied him curiously. He drove for the most part silently, his profile set and a little stern, against the window frame. Winks sat on the back seat and appeared to approve of Saxon. Christine wished Uncle Stanley would talk—she hardly knew what to say and yet it seemed so unfriendly to be driving through the pleasant shady streets in the golden light of the September late afternoon, and not say something.

"Did Mr. Hunter tell you I'd be on this train?" she asked desperately.

"He wrote us," her uncle answered, stopping the car in obedience to a traffic signal. "I just got in from the west last night and found his telegram and letter. Your cousin is ready for you."

"Isn't there another uncle?" Christine inquired hastily.

Her Uncle Stanley smiled and she decided she liked him.

"You have an Uncle Barry," he informed her. "He rarely leaves the house. He's somewhat of an invalid, though you are not to say anything like that to him. Well-meaning tactless people often hurt him by assuming that he must lead a useless life, when as a matter of fact he does more work than nine-tenths of the able-bodied men I know."

Christine reversed her decision. She did not like Uncle Stanley. The idea! Was it likely that she should charge upon a strange uncle and comment tactlessly on his ill health?

"I hope I have *some* sense!" she told herself wrathfully.

Luckily her uncle remained in ignorance of her irritation. Down one street and up another, around a drinking fountain set in a green square, he drove and finally turned in at a graveled drive leading to a pleasant, rambling red brick house set well back from the street.

"Here we are," he announced, as a white-capped maid opened the door at the top of the side porch steps.

Christine gathered Winks into her arms. He at least was a familiar friend. As she followed Uncle Stanley up the steps, the touch of the dog's rough little tongue against her cheek was vaguely comforting.

"Christine, this is your Uncle Barry," said the pleasant grave voice she had already learned to associate with Uncle Stanley.

Christine saw a charming room, a "different" room, a room that she instantly decided she liked better than any other room she had ever seen. The walls were book-shelves, some of them running up to the ceiling, some no higher than the mantelpiece. The lower shelves had broad tops and lovely pieces of pottery in dull blue and rose and soft yellow standing on them for ornament. On one side was a bricked fireplace, filled now with a mass of flowers, and opposite the fireplace, let into the wall above the shelves, was a casement window in three sections, all open this afternoon and letting in the late sun. A perfectly huge

flat-topped desk stood before double French windows at the end of the room directly in line with the doorway where Christine stood; these doors were open and through them she caught a glimpse of the garden. She saw all this in much less time than it takes to tell it, saw also the books that filled the shelves and overflowed onto small tables, into the deep leather chairs and the two padded backless seats on either side of the fireplace: then some one, who had been sitting at the desk, rose and came toward her. With a quick throb of pity, Christine noticed that he limped painfully, this tall thin man with the heavy straight olond hair brushed back from very blue eyes, bluer because set in such a tanned face. The warm firm hand he gave her was brown, too, and Christine thought swiftly that this lame uncle must be an outdoors kind of person, in spite of his ill health.

"Hello!" said Uncle Barry, smiling down at her. "This is fine! And a dog, too; I'll have to introduce him to the cook's cat."

Now that Christine had an opportunity to see the brothers together, she perceived that they

resembled each other and that the photograph of her father, which had stood on her bureau in a silver frame ever since she could remember, also looked like them. Uncle Stanley was not quite as tall as Uncle Barry; his dark hair was plentifully sprinkled with gray, though he could not be very old; his eyes were dark, too, but the rest of his face, nose and mouth and chin as well as the outline of his face, looked like his brother's.

"My heavens, she must take after her mother's folks!" said a voice behind Christine.

Her own thoughts had been so concerned with this question of family "looks," that it was small wonder Christine jumped. She turned her head to see a plump woman standing just in back of her. The wide figure was clad in a black dress covered with huge, sprawling white flowers, the neck of it pinned with a startlingly large black and white cameo. The face surmounting this very solid figure was sharp and thin as though, Christine found herself thinking hastily, the wrong head through some mistake, had been fitted to the body. Pale brown hair, light-colored eyes, a sharp mouth and a long, thin nose—

Christine felt confused. Surely all fat people, she argued, had fat faces and double chins.

"How de do, I'm your Cousin Lo," announced the newcomer in a high, nervous voice. "Oh, you've brought your dog; well, we can't have any dogs here."

Involuntarily Christine backed a step and found herself seated in one of the deep dark leather chairs, with her Uncle Barry perched on the arm. He had pulled her down into the comfortable cushions.

"My dog stays where I stay," said Christine, lifting her chin.

"Oh, hush, hush," Uncle Barry murmured good-humoredly. "Sit down, Lo, and Stan and let's all get acquainted."

Christine hugged Winks tightly against her, over his head her eyes scrutinizing the expansive Cousin Lo, seated in a straight-backed chair, completely overflowing it, and Uncle Stanley facing her from one of the fireside seats.

"Of course it's perfectly impossible to have that dog here," said Cousin Lo. "You'll have to tell the child so, Barry."

Christine glanced up in surprise, and Uncle Barry smiled reassuringly, while he reached over and patted one of Wink's silky ears.

"Miss Christine's room is ready, Miss Patchem," announced the maid from the doorway.

Christine stirred uneasily. No one, she reflected, had asked her to take off her hat. Grandma always made company comfortable at once—not that she would take off her hat, Christine told herself, before she found out whether or not she could keep Winks. Nothing would induce her to stay in a house where her dog couldn't stay, she fumed, forgetting that this was the only house to which she could go.

"Take off your hat, child, you look hot," said Cousin Lo, as if she had been reading Christine's thoughts. "And perhaps you'd like to see your room now. We can talk after dinner."

"I would rather talk now," Christine declared respectfully, but firmly, "about Winks."

Cousin Lo looked bewildered, but Uncle Barry understood.

"I think we'll have to have Winks, Cousin Lo,"

he said gently, "because we have to have Christine; now that we've seen her, we can never let her go."

"Why I thought—I was trying to save your feelings—well, I'm sure—" sputtered Cousin Lo.

"You were afraid I couldn't be sensible," Uncle Barry suggested cheerfully. "I might as well tell you, Christine, that this apparently inhospitable reaction to Winks is based upon a weakness of mine. My dog died while I was overseas and when I came home and missed him, I wouldn't have another pet. Every one in this house spoils me and gives in to me, so we haven't had a dog. Stan is mad about them, though, and he and Winks are doubtless laying plots together this minute."

Christine glanced toward her other uncle. He was gazing at Winks through half shut eyes and Christine could feel the dog's tail wagging under her arm. Uncle Stanley and Winks did like each other, then!

"If your uncles approve, I have nothing to say," commented Cousin Lo stiffly. "We'll go upstairs—is that your suitcase?"

She pointed to the neat black leather bag on the rug and Christine nodded. Cousin Lo irritated her—every time she spoke she seemed to be pouncing on some one or something.

"Where's your middle name?" demanded Cousin Lo accusingly.

She meant to refer, obviously, to the initials stenciled on the suitcase. A tiny gold C. C. gleamed neatly on the dull black leather.

"I haven't any middle name," Christine answered. "At least I don't use it," she emended, remembering that she did have a "middle name."

Cousin Lo sat up very straight.

"I intend to see that all your clothes are marked with name tapes," she announced, "and I shall see to it that they carry your full and proper name. You are Christine Lobelia Carpenter and there is no reason why you should try to conceal any part of it."

Christine sat up very straight herself. Indeed she tumbled the faithful Winks from her lap to the floor where he sat looking surprised and not exactly pleased.

"I hate and detest the name of Lobelia," de-

clared Christine with unnecessary vigor. "It's hideous. I've never used it. I won't wear anything with that silly name pinned on it."

"I don't want to ever hear you use that tone in speaking to your cousin," Uncle Stanley rebuked her sternly. "It will be just as well, also, if you do not state what you will or will not do."

Hot tears rushed into Christine's brown eyes. She had not meant to be rude, but her middle name was something about which she felt strongly. She had defended Winks and if there was no one to defend her, she could at least try to make these strangers understand.

"Lobelia is a dumb name," argued Christine stubbornly. "It sounds like the name of a fish. I don't see why I haven't a right to use the part of my name I like. Christine was my mother's name and I like it, but I never knew any one named Lobelia and I never want to."

Cousin Lo got to her feet with agility, considering her ponderous body. Her face was flushed and her voice shook as she began to speak.

"You're a spoiled, unmannerly, ignorant girl!" she scolded. "I wash my hands of you at

the start; the peace and comfort of this household is menaced, if I can read the signs and I flatter myself I can. Perhaps your Uncle Stanley can put you in your place—I'm sure for all our sakes I hope so."

She swept out of the room and Christine, aghast, looked at her Uncle Stanley who had risen, too, and who was frowning.

"Did I—did I—what did I do?" stammered Christine.

"You may not have known that Lobelia is your cousin's name, and I doubt if you do, or you would not have been so discourteous," Uncle Stanley informed her curtly. "That, however, is scarcely excuse for the defiant manner you displayed toward her. This is your cousin's home and she has a right to expect your respect and obedience."

Christine hoped she wasn't going to cry. Then something hot splashed down on her hands in her lap and she knew she *was* crying. Uncle Barry's arm went around her shoulder and she hid her face against the soft rough tweed of his coat.

"Hold up a little, Stan," said Uncle Barry's

voice. "I don't think we're very fair to Christine; she's had a long, tiring train trip. She hasn't had as much as a cup of tea, or been allowed to take off her hat or wash her hands. She's in a strange house and three strange people all scolding her at once.

"You haven't," whispered Christine, crying in earnest now into the tweed coat.

"All right, all right," Uncle Stanley conceded. "I only want Cousin Lo to be treated courteously; I'll explain to you about her, some day, Christine. Ring for Amelia, Barry, and she'll take Christine upstairs. Suppose I take Winks outdoors for a romp—the poor pup must want to stretch his legs after that train ride."

Christine sat up and mopped her eyes with a little pink handkerchief. She didn't cry very often and she did hope these two uncles of hers didn't think they had a weeping niece on their hands. She didn't like Cousin Lo one bit and living with her loomed dark and difficult, but perhaps she wouldn't have to stay here: she'd ask Uncle Barry to let her go back to Harrington

and live with the Shepherds. They would be glad to have her, for they had said so.

Uncle Stanley snapped his fingers at Winks and the dog looked up at Christine, begging her to come, too.

"You go play, Winks," commanded Christine. "I'll have to wash my face."

With a glad yelp Winks hurled himself through the French doors after Uncle Stanley and Christine heard them go noisily down the steps.

"Amelia, will you take Miss Christine up to her room and do everything you can to make her comfortable?" said Uncle Barry, who must have pressed some bell, for a smiling colored maid stood in the doorway.

CHAPTER III

IT'S HARD TO BE A STRANGER

CHRISTINE followed the maid out into a square hall and up a broad winding staircase. There was a landing and a window with a seat built beneath it, but Christine did not glance out—her thoughts were busy with planning to get back to Harrington; she was quite certain that she couldn't *stand* it to live here.

"This is your room, Miss Christine," said the maid's soft voice.

She had opened the door of a room down the hall and Christine stepped into an enchanting place. From the first moment she crossed the sill she felt the sense of peace and security that she was to always feel when she entered this room. It was simply furnished, in soft waxed finished furniture, the walls papered mistily in a blend of pink and blue and gray; but the four

windows, running across one wall were the chief feature. The windows were casements, curtained with plain net curtains to the sill. A window seat measured the entire length. And the view was of the garden!

"And this is your bathroom," said the soft voice again.

Christine turned from the windows to see a tiny bathroom adjoining the closet door. It was perfectly appointed, if small, and she was as delighted as any girl who has never had a bathroom for her exclusive use, could be.

"Isn't it sweet!" she exclaimed impulsively, and the gentle brown face watching her smiled in sympathy.

"It's going to be nice, having a girl in the house," the maid said.

As she unstrapped Christine's suitcase, and opened one of the casements a little wider, she explained that her name was Amelia Christmas. She had worked for "Miss Patchem" three years. It was a fine place for her, because she had two sisters "living out" in Saxton, but the house was a little quiet. She said all this in her soft, even

tones, without asking or apparently expecting, Christine to contribute a word.

"Miss Edith stirs up some excitement when she comes, but Mr. Barry is apt to get a headache, so she doesn't come over as much as she did," Amelia observed.

"You want me to help you any?" she added kindly.

Christine wanted very much to be alone for a few moments. She said she could get ready for dinner without any help and Amelia told her the gong would ring in fifteen minutes.

"Miss Patchem wants everybody to come running, too," said Amelia over her shoulder, as she left the room, closing the door gently behind her.

Christine walked over to the window seat and knelt with her elbows on the soft pink and gray cushions. She stared out at the garden scarcely noticing the lawns, the flowers and the winding paths. Her thoughts ran together confusedly. She wished she had never come. What a lovely tree—a purple beech, wasn't it? She and Winks would go away the next day. That steamer chair must be Uncle Barry's.

Then she saw her Uncle Stanley and Winks coming up one of the paths and she drew back —she didn't want Uncle Stanley to see her. He would probably tell her she must stay; but Uncle Barry looked as though he would listen to reason.

How long she knelt there, thinking vague thoughts, Christine didn't know. But she heard the gong, deep, vibrant, musical, presently.

"Oh, and I haven't changed my dress, nor even washed my face!" she exclaimed aloud in dismay.

She dashed into the bathroom and was washing her face when a knock sounded on the bedroom door.

"Dinner is ready, Christine," said Cousin Lo's voice stiffly.

Christine ran to the door but when she opened it, Cousin Lo was already half way down the stairs. There was nothing to do but go down in the dress she was wearing, though Christine was uncomfortably conscious that it was mussed from traveling. Still, it would be worse to be late at table.

She hurried down, to find the lame uncle waiting for her at the foot.

"Hungry?" he asked, glancing at her a little sharply.

"A little," admitted Christine, who was really very hungry indeed.

In the pleasant dining-room, Uncle Barry seated her on his left, Uncle Stanley pulling out Cousin Lo's chair. She sat at one end of the table, Uncle Barry at the other. Uncle Stanley faced Christine.

"I left Winks on the side porch," he said, as Amelia brought in the soup.

Christine decided that Cousin Lo really tried to be friendly during the meal. It wasn't her fault that everything she said sounded like a command, nor that some of the questions she asked Christine regarded as too personal. Both uncles deferred to her and seemed to respect her opinion. She even argued with Uncle Stanley and already Christine had sensed that few people took that liberty.

Christine gathered during the conversation that Cousin Lo was in full charge of the house-

keeping, directing the cook and Amelia, a laundress who came in a few days a week and overseeing the handy man who gardened, ran the car when requested and attended to the fires in winter. Cousin Lo was an expert housekeeper—Christine conceded that. The dinner was perfectly served and cooked, the house in exquisite order. Only, from something that was said as they left the dining-room, Christine understood that the bowls and vases of flowers were a concession to Uncle Barry, not an indication of Cousin Lo's taste. Later she learned that Cousin Lo thought flowers made too much work and muss but in common with every one else in that household, she would cheerfully have spent her life cleaning up any number of "messes" for the sake of "Mr. Barry."

"School begins next Monday," announced Cousin Lo, as they went out on the front porch. "I must go over your clothes and get them ready as soon as your trunk comes, Christine."

Christine did not look pleased. For some inexplicable reason everything Cousin Lo said rubbed her the wrong way. Something in the

sight of that plump figure, rocking gently in a wicker rocking chair, irritated her.

"Come sit with me in the swing, Christine," said Uncle Barry.

And Christine, who was perhaps feeling a little homesick, just at this lonely hour, stooped to gather up Winks as he came dashing out of the house (having been searching the rooms for her).

"It will be all right if I go back to-morrow, won't it?" said Christine, and because she had a lump in her throat, her voice sounded cold and defiant.

"Go where?" asked Uncle Stanley from the top of the step where he sat.

Christine found herself in the swing, two pillows at her back, Winks in her lap, Uncle Barry beside her.

"You can't go back, because this is the only home you have," declared Cousin Lo, rocking steadily. "Your uncles are your guardians."

"I'm going back," Christine said, still in that curious voice not at all like her natural tones. "I can live with the Shepherds. They asked me to."

"Oh, Christine!"—this was Uncle Barry. "You haven't even given us a trial. We may be ever so much nicer than the Shepherds, after you get to know us."

Christine was silent.

"We'll have a talk in the morning," said Uncle Stanley firmly. "There are several matters to be settled. You will learn to adjust yourself, Christine: you can't go through the world dodging situations because they're not exactly to your liking."

The homesick feeling within Christine grew stronger.

"I hoped you'd get here on an earlier train," declared Cousin Lo, leaning forward to watch a passing figure. "I wanted to take you over to see the Haddons; Ramona Haddon is such a sweet girl. You couldn't have a lovelier friend. She will take you to school and help you to get acquainted."

Christine wondered resentfully how old Cousin Lo thought she could be. She didn't want any girl to "take" her to school.

"Go to bed early and come out and help me

garden in the morning, will you, Christine?" said Uncle Barry, laying his thin, firm hand on hers.

That lump in Christine's throat melted.

"Yes," she answered and just then a girl's voice called gayly, "Grandma! Grandma! I'm only going up to the library—be right back!"

Christine had so often called that dear name! She had to remind herself sternly that she was too old to cry—at least until she could cry in bed where no one could see her.

"That's the girl next door," explained Uncle Barry, tactfully giving her time to recover herself. "She has red hair and the name of Jane. You'll like her."

Cousin Lo sat up stiff and straight.

"Now, Barry, don't put ideas into Christine's head," she warned. "This Jane isn't the kind of a girl I can really approve; she's too independent and she isn't always respectful to her elders. Though, for that matter, mighty few young people of to-day are."

Christine tried to rise: Uncle Barry's thin hand, touching hers so lightly, held her back.

"I think," said Christine constrainedly, "I'll go to bed."

This time she found herself free. She felt Winks' sympathetic tongue on her cheek as she stood up.

"Where is that dog going to sleep?" demanded Cousin Lo, who rocked faster every time she asked a question.

Christine met the challenge.

"He always sleeps in my room," she declared.

"He can't sleep in your bedroom in this house," Cousin Lo pronounced. "Stanley, don't you think the garage would be a good place for him?"

Christine turned blindly to the one person she felt to be her friend in this unfriendly household. Anger and grief struggling in her flushed face, unshed tears in her brown eyes, she looked appealingly at Uncle Barry who sat quietly in the swing.

"Uncle Barry!" she cried, using his name for the first time. "I *have* to have Winks sleep with me. He loves me. I can sleep in the garage, if you don't want him in the house, but I have to

have Winks. He's my dog. *Please* let him sleep with me."

She heard Cousin Lo murmur something about "self-willed children," she saw Uncle Stanley's frown. But all she understood, all that mattered was the single word Uncle Barry spoke as he rose and limped toward her.

"No, Christine," he said, but his eyes and voice were kind.

CHAPTER IV

LET'S PLAY FAIR

CHRISTINE learned a great deal in the next few moments. She learned that both Cousin Lo and Uncle Stanley talked more than Uncle Barry did; that the latter seldom said "No" outright, but that when he did, he meant it. She learned that even a room with four windows and her own bathroom didn't mean much when a girl was unhappy and lonely and felt herself misunderstood.

Winks was to sleep on the side porch—that was finally settled. Alone in her room Christine locked the door and began to pack her suitcase feverishly. Cousin Lo came and knocked and when Christine, without opening the door said "Yes?" Cousin Lo asked uncertainly whether she could do anything to help her.

She meant help her get ready for bed and Christine, packing the suitcase, knew that, of

course. But she said "No, thank you," and Cousin Lo went away.

Had she been a different kind of woman, had she been able to show affection, she might have helped Christine more at that moment than she would ever be able to again. A little affection, a little tact, some show of sympathy, would have melted the stubbornness: if Christine could have put her head down on Cousin Lo's shoulder and cried her heart out, she would have found it easier to make the adjustments expected of her. But poor Cousin Lo didn't know how to be demonstrative.

The suitcase packed, Christine sat down on the window seat. She had turned off the light, but it was moonlight and she could see the watch on her wrist, if she looked closely. Half past nine—she must wait until every one in the house was asleep.

Somewhere a piano sounded—downstairs, she decided, listening intently.

She rose and went over to the door. Unlocking it she opened it a few inches. Yes, some one downstairs was playing softly. Instinctively she

know it couldn't be Cousin Lo—but which uncle could play like that?

Then the music stopped. Uncle Stanley's voice sounded in the hall. "I'm going over to Edith's for an hour," he said.

The screen door slammed and the piano began again. It must be Uncle Barry who played.

Christine closed the door and turned the key. Nothing squeaked, thanks to Cousin Lo's perfect housekeeping. She wouldn't have a hinge or a lock in her house that needed oiling or which didn't give full service.

It did take them a long time to go to bed! Several times Christine squinted at her watch, sure that it must be 'most morning. Ten, half past ten, and still the lights burned downstairs, as repeated peeps from her door showed her. Then Christine went to sleep, sitting upright on the window seat, and when she woke, a little cramped and chilly, the hands of her watch pointed to half past eleven.

She cautiously opened her door. Everything dark. Now if the stairs didn't creak, and Winks didn't make a fuss over her when he saw her——

Christine began to descend the stairs carefully. She had to feel her way and once she nearly dropped the suitcase. That would have been nice, she scolded herself.

She gained the first floor, without making a noise. She wasn't sure how one reached the side door, so she decided to leave by way of the front door, and go round outside the house till she found Winks.

She unhooked the chain on the front door and was fumbling with the heavy key, when to her horror a sudden path of light streamed straight across the rug to her feet.

She looked up and there, in a doorway facing her, stood her Uncle Barry. He was fully dressed and behind him she glimpsed a room that must be his bedroom.

"Don't do that," said Uncle Barry quietly.

He spoke in a low voice, but with no hint of whispering.

"Don't do what?" Christine countered shakily.

"Run away from your problem," said Uncle Barry, crossing the hall to take the suitcase from Christine's limp hands.

"I sleep on this floor, to save my old leg extra work climbing the stairs," Uncle Barry went on, quite as though he and Christine were having an ordinary chat at an ordinary hour in the day.

"I was reading, instead of turning in as I should have done an hour ago, and I thought I heard a noise. I come out and here you are."

Christine, not knowing what to say, said nothing.

"Sit down," directed her uncle, pointing to a carved chest against the wall which made an excellent seat. "Can't you tell me what the trouble is, Christine?"

"It's everything!" Christine burst out childishly. "I can't have Winks sleep with me and he always has, all his life; I hate the name of Lobelia and I don't want it on my clothes; I don't want any one to fix my clothes, either—I can do it myself. And I don't want any girl named Ramona to take me to school, either! I'm almost fourteen and I can go to school by myself, I hope."

Uncle Barry didn't laugh. Neither did he

scold. He merely said "I see, I see," in the kindest voice in the world.

"Well, suppose you were to run away," he suggested then, "would that settle all these worries for you?"

"Oh, yes," Christine assured him. "Mrs. Shepherd would let me do just as I wanted to; she thinks girls are nice."

"Well, so do I," smiled Uncle Barry—he had turned on one light of the cluster that decorated the newel post.

"I think girls are far too nice to be allowed to do just as they want to all the time."

"But I'm so unhappy!" Christine protested. "I would rather live in Harrington, Uncle Barry."

"You haven't given us a fair trial," her uncle responded. "I know you want to play fair, Christine; why not stick it out here for six months and then see how you feel toward us?"

"Six months," said Christine with a little sigh, "is an awfully long time."

Uncle Barry drew forward a four-footed stool and seated himself opposite Christine.

"You mustn't be as unhappy as this," he urged. "I'm afraid you're not going at your problem in the right way."

Christine glanced about the shadowy hall. She heard a clock ticking in some room near by. An automobile horn honked outside.

"There's Cousin Lo," she argued. "She doesn't like me."

"I think you mean you don't like her," said Uncle Barry. "You don't know her, Christine. And that's the whole heart of your trouble—when you don't like people, or don't get along with them, it means you don't know or understand them. Nine times out of ten, it's your fault."

Christine looked unconvinced.

"Stick it out, wait a little, learn to know us, before you judge," went on Uncle Barry. "And don't run away from trouble—that isn't like you, I'm sure."

Christine stood up, her eyes fixed on her suitcase standing forlornly in the center of the rug.

"All right," she said briefly.

"Good girl," approved Uncle Barry.

Then he smiled, the smile of a friendly conspirator.

"I don't know how you feel," he said, "but I'm hungry. We might go out in the kitchen and look around."

Christine had not been able to eat much dinner. She had not felt at home. Conscious now of a decidedly empty feeling, she nodded.

"Come ahead, then, and don't make any noise," her uncle cautioned. "Cousin Lo would lie awake the rest of the night if she thought we had anything to eat after ten o'clock."

It was on the tip of Christine's tongue to ask if this was Cousin Lo's house, but she stopped herself in time. One didn't say things like that to Uncle Barry.

In the immaculate white and yellow tiled kitchen, they set themselves a little feast. Rich creamy milk, cold chicken, bread and butter and two blackberry tarts. Uncle Barry was doubtful about the tarts but when Christine, who was exploring the ice box, found them, he could not resist her coaxing.

"They're not *pie!*" she explained seriously.

"Grandma wouldn't let me eat pie at midnight, of course, but I've had tarts once or twice, real late. You see, there is very little crust."

Uncle Barry capitulated. They had the tarts. Afterward they even managed to wash the dishes, noiselessly, and put them away. Uncle Barry said that Carolina, the cook, would miss the food, but she would blame him; he often ate a little midnight supper all by himself.

"Half past twelve!" he exclaimed, looking at his watch, as Christine put a pink china plate on the shelf in the kitchen cupboard where she saw other pink china plates. "Goodness, child, I'm no guardian for you; off with you to bed and for heaven's sake, don't tell me in the morning that you've had indigestion so you couldn't sleep."

Christine laughed. She had a charming laugh, with a husky note in it like her contralto voice.

"I can always sleep," she said happily.

"Some day you will sing," Uncle Barry returned with apparent irrelevance. "When you're a little older you must have vocal lessons. Do you play?"

"A little," admitted Christine cautiously. "I

wish I could play like you—you *were* playing to-night, weren't you?"

"Yes, after dinner," Uncle Barry answered. "I'll teach you, if you're interested; I've always wanted to give music lessons."

Christine's face was radiant.

"I will practice *forever!*" she promised fervently.

Uncle Barry smiled and reached for the light chain which dangled from the globe above him.

"This isn't getting to bed," he said. "I'll carry your suitcase—run along, child."

Christine didn't dare leave her suitcase in the hall till morning, lest Cousin Lo "prowling," as Christine phrased it, should find it; neither did she want to see her lame uncle carry it up the stairs. But Uncle Barry disposed of the matter without question, seizing the case and limping ahead of Christine, who had to feel for each step in the dark.

He left her, with a friendly little pat on her shoulder, in the upper hall and Christine, now intensely weary and half dead for sleep, undressed in her pretty room without a light. She

tumbled into bed and was asleep before she could remember what she had done with the telltale suitcase.

She woke to find the room flooded with sunshine and Amelia Christmas standing at the foot of the bed.

"Miss Patchem was afraid you must be sick," said Amelia. "You just couldn't seem to wake up; Mr. Stanley told her the journey must have tired you out. Shall I bring you your breakfast on a tray?"

Christine glanced at her watch—it had stopped.

"It's ten o'clock," Amelia announced. "Your dog has been hunting all over for you. Miss Patchem wouldn't let him in the house so he went into the garden with Mr. Barry. They want you to come to Mr. Barry's study when you are awake."

Christine smiled. Amelia's soft voice made a pleasant murmur and she seemed to like to talk without waiting for any response. Christine liked her.

"If every one's had breakfast, I suppose I

might as well have mine up here, if it isn't making too much trouble," she decided. "But I'll get up and dress; I hate eating in bed."

Not even to herself would Christine admit that she didn't want to face Cousin Lo across a late breakfast table.

"You forgot to put your suitcase away," said Amelia. "It was in the middle of the floor—I just stuck it in the clothes closet for you. Your trunk's come—it's in the hall; Roy will bring it in for you some time this morning. I'll go get your tray."

All Amelia's sentences were short, Christine reflected, as she bathed and dressed. She chose the yellow linen she had tucked into her suitcase; yellow set off the gold of her hair, deepened the brown of her eyes. Christine had pretty clothes and a good many of them, for her grandmother had been a woman of excellent taste and judgment.

She glanced out of the window when she was dressed; there, in the steamer chair, under the beech tree, lay Uncle Barry, his head thrown back, his newspaper trailing on the ground from

one listless hand. Winks lay curled up beside him.

"Here's your breakfast," said Amelia's soft voice. "I guess you didn't hear me knock."

Christine had not heard. She had been wondering about Uncle Barry. Whether he found it hard to be lame.

"As soon as you all finish, Mr. Stanley says will you please come down to Mr. Barry's study," Amelia reported, arranging the tray on a small table.

Christine assented and Amelia went away. The breakfast was very nice and beautifully garnished. Christine felt that Carolina, or Amelia, had planned the tray; Cousin Lo might know how to cook but she wouldn't see any need for making food look attractive.

With her healthy young appetite, Christine did full justice to the bacon and egg and toast and drank the last drop of milk. Then she unpacked her suitcase and put the things away. She opened the casements wide; pulled back the covers from the bed; went into the bathroom and

hung up a towel she had carelessly dropped over a chair.

"Stalling!" she told herself scornfully at last. "You might as well go down and get it over with."

And before she could think of another excuse for remaining in her room, Christine was out in the hall and marching down the stairs. As she reached the study, she heard voices. She tapped gently.

"Come in, Christine!" called her Uncle Barry.

CHAPTER V

JUST JANE PINE

SITUATIONS are seldom as difficult as we picture them. Christine found the dreaded interview with her uncles far less unpleasant than she had anticipated. Uncle Stanley did most of the talking at first; he was, Christine gathered, the head of the family and older than Uncle Barry.

He explained that he and his brother were joint guardians of Christine under the terms of her father's will; that the money left her by her father would be hers on her twenty-first birthday. It would not be a great deal, but there was enough to educate her, send her to college, if she wished to go, and provide her with a small regular income.

Uncle Stanley was very business-like, and direct. Christine liked this aspect of him. He talked to her as though she were one of his clients,

and Christine liked to be treated as a grown person. She was to have a weekly allowance, which might be increased if, after school opened, she found that she needed more and could give reasons for spending it. She was to keep an account of her expenditures—every one in the house did. It was, said Uncle Stanley, the only way to prove that you were capable of handling your own money.

"We want you to be happy here," he said then. "You'll make friends of your own age fast enough and then you'll find the house less dull. If you aren't happy, or if you feel yourself misunderstood, come to one of us and we'll try to straighten things out. It's nice to have you here, Christine—your father was a wonderful older brother to Barry and me."

He held out his hand and Christine laid hers confidingly in it. Then, to her own surprise, for it was not in the least what she intended to say, she heard her voice remarking, "But I just can't *stand* having that hateful name 'Lobelia' on clothes!"

"I want to speak to you about that, Christine," said Uncle Stanley, gravely.

But he had to wait for at that moment, a small body hurled itself up the steps and into the room. Winks leaped upon Christine with frantic yelps of delight. He licked her face, her hands. He stood up in her lap and put his paws on her shoulders. He jumped to the floor and tore round her chair in circles. He acted like a mad dog, and he was mad with delight.

"He thought I was lost, I think," said Christine, when the first fine frenzy had worn off and Winks consented to curl up in the chair beside her, his eyes fixed adoringly on her face.

"About Cousin Lo," went on Uncle Stanley who never, as Christine was to learn, lost sight of his subject-matter. "She is absolutely alone in the world, Christine, except for us; she makes her home here and oversees the housekeeping. She is sensitive and easily hurt, so for that reason, if for no other, I'm sure you will try to be always courteous and respectful to her."

"But I wasn't named for her, was I?" asked

Christine, with such a look of consternation that Uncle Barry frankly laughed.

"Lobelia is an old family name, Christine," he assured her, his eyes still twinkling. "I think myself it is pretty awful."

"Why do I need my clothes marked anyway?" insisted Christine. "I'm not going away to school."

Uncle Stanley rubbed his hair.

"I don't know anything about it," he declared, "except that Lo seems to think your clothes should be marked; does it make much difference to you, Christine?"

Now another girl might have said "No," and endured the infliction of the name sweetly, comforted by the consciousness that she was pleasing an elderly cousin. Still another girl might have said "No," and been secretly resentful. But Christine was Christine, as honest as the day, as stormy as the wind.

"I can't stand it!" she cried earnestly. "It makes all the difference in the world to me, Uncle Stanley: it's a hideous old name and I won't go around sounding like a patent medicine!'

"You needn't shout," said Cousin Lo coldly from the doorway. "It isn't necessary to tell the servants how you feel about a name which your ancestors have honored for several generations. If you feel as you seem to feel about the name, I would be the last person to advise you to use it. I myself feel that 'Christine' isn't distinctive; but then some girls are never so happy as when they are like every one else."

Uncle Barry's level look restrained Christine; after all, it must be unpleasant for the two uncles to hear Cousin Lo and their niece saying unkind things to each other whenever they met.

"Though how I'm going to stand her for six months, I really do not see," sighed Christine, going down the steps into the garden fifteen minutes later.

She walked down one of the gravelly paths, not seeing the beds of flowers. Winks followed her softly, acutely aware that her mood was unhappy. Winks always knew when his folks were content or when they were worried. Christine brushed past a riot of bloom, scarcely glancing to the right or left of her and she almost walked

into a wire fence, but a gay voice stopped her just in time.

" 'Ware wire!" said a red-headed girl. "My, what a pretty dress!"

Christine stared in astonishment. She was looking over into a yard about half the width of the garden in which she stood. Board fences hemmed in the strip of ground. Near the boundary line against which Christine pressed, was a spreading maple tree—an old, generous sized maple. The ground under it was cut and hacked like a battle-field. A sand box stood to one side, a dilapidated rocking horse next to that; on a small rug spread in the thickest part of the shade, the red-headed girl sat, a white kettle on her aproned lap. She was shelling peas.

"I'm Jane Pine," she said in the friendliest fashion. "You must be the Carpenters' niece—aren't you?"

"Yes, I'm Christine," that young person acknowledged, smiling.

And in a little rush, they proceeded to get acquainted as girls have always done and always will. Jane, Christine learned, had a father and

a mother and a grandmother; an older brother, Billy, an older sister, Nina, and two little brothers and one younger sister.

"We crowd the house, but we have good times," said Jane contentedly. "Billy's a sophomore in High this year; I'm a freshman—you'll be in the first class, too, Ramona Haddon told me. Nina goes to business and the kids, except the baby, are in primary school."

Jane thought Winks was a charming dog and said so. Christine scrambled over the wire fence and insisted on helping shell the peas. The two girls were having a fine industrious time together, when Uncle Barry came limping down the path to tell Christine that luncheon was ready.

He and Jane were evidently good friends, for they greeted each other gayly. Christine would have liked to ask Jane to lunch and in her grandmother's house she would have done so; but she didn't know how Cousin Lo regarded unexpected guests.

"See you again," called Jane cheerfully, as Christine scrambled back across the fence.

"I must cut a gate through for you," said

Uncle Barry, limping beside Christine as they went slowly toward the house. "You can't crawl over a wire fence each time you want to go into the Pine yard; I think you'll like Jane—she's as straightforward as you are."

Christine glanced at him in some surprise.

"Blunt, truthful, sometimes forgetting to be tolerant and kind, but a girl to bank on, every time," said Uncle Barry, apparently speaking to himself.

"I *will* have more patience and I *will* hold my tongue," thought Christine.

At the luncheon table Cousin Lo announced that she had planned to take Christine to call on Ramona Haddon that afternoon.

"The Haddons are a lovely family," said Cousin Lo complacently, "and Ramona is my ideal of what a girl should be."

Christine, forgetting her excellent resolutions, allowed herself to dislike the unseen Ramona heartily. Cousin Lo, she thought, made it so clear that her ideal of all a girl should be was certainly not sitting at the lunch table at that moment.

"Ramona will take you to school, Monday," said Cousin Lo.

The last shred of Christine's good resolutions shriveled.

"I don't need any one to take me to school," she announced. "I'm not going to kindergarten; I know how to register and I've brought a copy of my record from the Harrington school."

Uncle Stanley was not present. He had gone into the city. Later Christine learned that he had missed his usual train by more than two hours, to have the conference with her.

"Ramona can make things very pleasant for you," said Cousin Lo, who when she pleased seemed not to hear what other people said. "She knows all the girls and is very popular."

Uncle Barry looked across the table at Christine. Something in his expression reminded her of their talk the night before. So did his next words.

"Give Ramona a trial, Christine," he suggested, smiling.

CHAPTER VI

EDITH COMES TO DINNER

"I DON'T seem to like any one, any more," thought Christine unhappily that afternoon.

For a moment she was conscious of a sense of panic: suppose she should never be able to like any one again? In Harrington she had liked people, she reminded herself. They had liked her, too. Then she remembered that she liked Jane Pine very much indeed and the recollection comforted her.

She sat beside Cousin Lo, on a huge overstuffed divan, in the living room of the Haddons. Cousin Lo was beaming complacently at Ramona Haddon and Ramona's mother. Mrs. Haddon was what Christine characterized as a "fussy" woman. She fidgeted. She flounced. She incessantly adjusted her bracelets, patted a

pillow into shape, picked a thread off her own blouse or Ramona's dress.

"Darling, you'll sing for Christine, won't you?" she suggested as soon as the remarks on the weather, comments Cousin Lo never omitted, had been exchanged.

Ramona nodded and strolled languidly over to the piano to pick up—of all things!—a guitar! Christine gazed critically at her hostess. Evidently the Haddons considered Ramona the Spanish "type" but, Christine privately decided, Ramona must have been christened before her type developed; aside from the fact that she had black eyes and hair, there was nothing of the Spanish about her.

She was a thin, straight girl, long, thin legs, thin bony arms, a thin face with high cheekbones and a wide mouth. Her oily straight hair was combed straight into her eyes and cut with a square bang. She wore red earrings and three or four rings. Her dress was black with huge red circles printed on it. Her patent leather slippers boasted high heels. Christine thought she dressed atrociously and when Cousin Lo mur-

mured something about how "picturesque" she always looked, Christine was genuinely puzzled.

But when Ramona seated herself on a low stool and began to sing, Christine, quite unprepared, barely saved herself from disgrace; she had to bite her lips to keep from laughing. Never, in her life, had she heard such wailing! Ramona twanged the strings of her instrument, rolled her eyes, opened her mouth and positively squawked! Christine's face went scarlet under her effort at self-control; she wished wildly that she could choke and leave the room on pretext of getting a glass of water. Out of one eye she saw Cousin Lo, listening, enraptured. Well, she meant to ask Uncle Barry what he thought of Ramona's music—how Cousin Lo could live in the same house with Uncle Barry and his piano, and then pretend to admire this performance, was something Christine was sure she would never be able to understand.

Ramona sang three songs. Christine, vastly relieved when she stopped, tried to echo Cousin Lo's unstinted praise. But Ramona was used to adulation and she replaced the guitar on the

piano with the air of a concert star who had finished her numbers.

"I hope you'll call Monday and take Christine to school, Ramona," said Cousin Lo. "I'm anxious for her to meet the right girls. It will be so pleasant for her, to enter with you, and not feel herself a stranger."

"I'll stop for her," said Ramona briefly.

She gave Christine an appraising look from her dark eyes. Why she didn't like her, any more than Christine fancied her! This revelation gave Christine a distinct shock; like most of us, she was apt to think that while she disliked some folk, every one was inclined to like her.

A worried-looking maid brought in iced tea and little cakes and a few minutes later Christine and Cousin Lo were taking their leave. Mrs. Haddon reminded Cousin Lo that she hadn't been over for dinner recently and Cousin Lo's answer was illuminating.

"Well, Carrie, I have the house on my hands and everything to see to, you know; the maids require constant watching. And now with Christine to look after, I daresay I'll be twice as busy;

but I'll try to come over some night next week."

Christine was turning this speech over in her mind, as they walked down the wide, shaded street. She happened to raise her eyes as they approached a handsome car and, watching her curiously from beautiful dark blue eyes, she saw a young woman. She was so pretty, that Christine stared at her a little breathlessly. She had dark soft hair under a close pink hat; her dress was pink, too, smartly tailored, and a pink and white sweater lay in a fluffy heap beside her.

"Good afternoon," said Cousin Lo primly, when they were opposite the car.

The young woman was more than pretty—she was beautiful. Christine thought she had never seen a lovelier picture. She waited for Cousin Lo to say something after they had passed the car, but the older woman kept an obstinate silence.

"Wasn't she lovely!" said Christine finally, in sheer desperation.

"It's a pity she hasn't a little better disposition," was Cousin Lo's answer to this. "She's Edith Foster and she has a perfectly fiendish

temper. She's engaged to your Uncle Stanley and a nice life they will have of it together."

Engaged to Uncle Stanley! Christine remembered his, "I'm going over to Edith's for an hour"; she also remembered that Amelia Christmas had spoken of "Miss Edith," who made the house lively, but who didn't come over as often as she had because of Uncle Barry's headaches.

"Oh, I think she is sweet!" Christine told herself enthusiastically.

But the very next evening something happened that sent all Christine's dreams about the lovely lady who was some day to be her aunt, toppling headlong.

Cousin Lo had mentioned at the dinner table that she and Christine had passed "Edith Foster," and Uncle Stanley had suggested they have her to dinner so that she might meet Christine.

"She's heard all about you," he explained, smiling at Christine, "and she's the one who advised me not to send you to boarding school. Edith spent all her teens away at school and she said you were entitled to a little family life."

Christine wondered what Uncle Stanley had

said about her to this lovely Edith; she hoped the pretty girl might like her. She was so busy wondering what she had better wear the next night, that Uncle Barry had to repeat his question.

"I asked you, Christine, whether you went to see Ramona this afternoon?"

Christine glanced at him suspiciously. Yes, his eyes were twinkling. She knew then, that he must have a fair idea of how Ramona entertained her guests and he had probably heard her sing.

"She's coming to take me to school Monday, which is perfect nonsense," announced Christine, forgetting to be tactful. "I don't need to be taken to school like a primary kid."

"Ramona can smooth your way for you, if you have the good sense to follow her leadership," Cousin Lo bridled. "I must say, from the way you've acted already, you'll need tactful friends, Christine. You don't seem to have had any social training."

Christine swallowed her indignation with her dessert. Uncle Barry was absolutely wrong, but there was no use arguing with him. Whether she

stayed six months or sixteen here, she would never, never learn to like Cousin Lo.

After dinner Cousin Lo went to the telephone to ask Edith Foster to "come over" the next evening; she was evidently trying to be cordial and was apparently genuinely pleased when she could report an acceptance. "Tell her I'll stop for her," said Uncle Stanley, and Christine who liked "romances" as much as any girl does, went to bed to think about wedding cake and weddings and to plan what one should say if one should ever be asked to serve as bridesmaid.

The next evening Christine dressed carefully in her best summer frock, a soft beige crêpe made simply and becomingly. With brown suede slippers and matching stockings, her golden hair brushed till it shimmered, she made a pretty picture as she came down the stairs. Uncle Barry, passing through the hall, smiled at her appreciatively.

"I picked the last pink rose and you shall have it," he told her, holding out a creamy pink bud to her. "It's nice to have you here, Christine."

She pinned the rose at the neck of her frock

while he watched her. Dear Uncle Barry, who always made her feel "good," she thought, not knowing any other word for the feeling of peace and contentment that pervaded her whenever she spoke to this uncle or he to her.

"Christine, I want you to put that dog out of this house!" Cousin Lo bustled in from the kitchen, a red spot burning on either cheek, her voice sharp with irritation, a gingham apron pinned over her black lace frock.

"It's bad enough to look forward to the winter when I suppose I'll have to endure that animal under foot, but have him in the house in this warm weather, I simply will not!" and Cousin Lo came to a stop because she had no more breath for the moment.

"Where is he?" asked Christine shortly, avoiding Uncle Barry's eye. She knew her tone was ungracious.

"In the kitchen tormenting the cook," Cousin Lo replied. "Hurry and get him out before Edith comes; I have enough on my mind, without having to worry over a dog, I should think!"

Christine went out into the kitchen and scooped

up the panting Winks from his strategic position under the table. Winks had taken Carolina to his heart upon first sight; she returned his affection except in moments of stress like the present.

"I'll save him his dinner," she promised Christine, with a flashing smile, as she stirred the gravy.

Carolina and Amelia, Christine reflected, thrusting Winks outside the screen door, were never too tired or too busy to be friendly.

Then the lovely Edith came up the front steps and Christine thought she saw a princess out of a fairy tale. Edith wore blue taffeta, short in front to reveal her pretty stockings and shoes, almost touching the floor in back. Her lovely neck and shoulders were bare. As she stepped into the hall, she dropped her scarf, a tissue of lace and spangles, frail as a cobweb, into the porch swing.

"This is our Christine," said Uncle Barry, bringing Christine forward.

"Hello, Christine," Edith greeted her, holding out a firm, compact little hand. "I hope you'll reform this household while you're being brought up by two bachelor uncles. You can make lots

of improvements in their ways, if you care to try."

Christine laughed and Edith looked at her approvingly.

"You ought to sing with a voice like that," she said carelessly. "Where's Miss Patchem?"

Christine heard Uncle Stanley say something in a low voice.

"I won't call her 'Lo,' " said Edith, not lowering her voice at all. "It's a perfectly silly name and Lobelia is worse. I can't help it, can I, if some one named her for a sunflower?"

Christine giggled and Uncle Stanley shot her a warning look. Cousin Lo was coming down the hall, a patch of flour on one cheek, her whole manner suggestive of a hostess who has just left the roast on its way from the oven to the dining-room table. There was no reason, Christine told herself, why Cousin Lo should work herself into a frenzy, simply because a guest had arrived for dinner. With two maids, as well trained as Carolina and Amelia, Cousin Lo need not have gone into the kitchen at all.

"My dear, I'm so glad you could come," said Cousin Lo with more warmth than she usually displayed. "Dinner is ready—shall we go in?"

Christine enjoyed the dinner. She sat next to Edith Foster and that young woman's gay chatter kept them all smiling. Christine couldn't help noticing that Edith didn't pay much attention to Uncle Stanley and that once or twice, when he made a suggestion, or an assertion, she rather pointedly refused to agree with him. She was willful, no doubt of that, and perhaps she had a temper, too—not the "fiendish" temper Cousin Lo credited her with, but a tendency to quick anger, such as Christine herself possessed. But Christine admired her whole-heartedly and thought her altogether lovely.

She was studying the diamond and emerald ring on Edith's left hand when Uncle Barry suggested that they have coffee in the garden. There would not be many more evenings, he said, left them, that season.

"You'll need your scarf, Edith," said Uncle Stanley, as they rose from the table.

"I'll get it," Christine offered, remembering she had seen it in the swing.

As she stepped out on the front porch, she gasped, then darted down the steps crying, "Winks! Give it to me, do you hear?"

CHAPTER VII

THUNDERSTORMS

WINKS had the lovely silver spangled scarf and he saw no reason for giving it up. Christine hadn't paid much attention to him since their arrival in this strange town, and Winks was pleased that he should have attracted her attention to himself.

He tore across the lawn, dragging the delicate fabric after him. Christine raced breathlessly after him. Around the house fled Winks and straight into the group sitting beside the coffee service Cousin Lo had had brought out and placed on a wheeled table.

"Oh, my scarf!" cried Edith in dismay.

"Drop it, sir!"—that was Uncle Stanley.

Winks instantly released the scarf and looked abashed. Christine picked up the tattered remains and faced Edith bravely.

"I *am* so sorry!" she faltered. "Perhaps I can buy you another one like it."

To her surprise, Edith seized the scarf and ripped it across. She flung the two pieces at Winks and her face flooded crimson with anger.

"Take your horrid dog out of my sight!" she stormed. "If he hasn't been taught to leave people's property alone, it's time some one taught him; I got that scarf in Paris last summer!"

Christine had always supposed that grown-ups had better control of their tempers than younger folk; but there was no mistaking Edith's feelings —she was having a tantrum just as truly as the five-year-old who had lived next door to Grandma in Harrington had temper fits. Only the five-year-old had usually been spanked and there was no one apparently who wished to interfere with Edith.

"I hope now you're satisfied," remarked Cousin Lo with her fatal habit of saying the wrong thing at the wrong time.

"I think the sooner you get rid of that dog, the better for all of us."

Christine rose from her knees, Winks in her

arms. She had had to crawl under a chair to scoop Winks from the ground, where he lay rolling in a foolish effort to protect himself.

"I won't get rid of Winks!" she flared. "It wasn't his fault—if you'd let him come in the house, he wouldn't have seen the scarf. He was only playing. You——"

"Christine!" Uncle Stanley's cold voice halted her rushing words.

"I think you'd better go into the house," he went on, "since you don't seem to be able to be courteous."

Christine, holding fast to Winks, found her way up the path and into the house, through a mist of tears. She gained her room before the flood broke and then, dropping the astonished Winks and flinging herself on the bed, she cried desperately. It was all very well for Uncle Barry to talk, she sobbed frantically to herself, but when things happened to her he never *spoke*. As for Edith Foster, she was horrid! She might have known Winks didn't mean to destroy her scarf; if the scarf were destroyed, a lady would pretend it didn't matter!

Winks on the floor groaned. Then he cocked his ears—the door was opening, but Christine didn't hear it. She had buried her head in the pillow and she was half smothered. But as she felt, she *wanted* to be uncomfortable.

A rustle, a breath of the sweetest fragrance, two soft, cool hands lifting her tear-stained face —the startled Christine found herself gazing into the blue eyes of Edith Foster.

"Oh, you poor, poor lamb!" said Edith in quick pity. "I told Stan I knew you were crying."

Heedless of her frock, she scrambled up on the bed and took Christine in her arms.

"Don't you care, darling," she murmured. "Christine, you mustn't cry like this! You'll make yourself ill."

"I can't—stop—quick!" gasped Christine. "I will in—a—a—minute."

Edith nodded comprehendingly and sat stroking Christine's gold hair in silence for a little while.

"You mustn't feel badly about Stan," she said

presently. "You ought to have heard what he said to me after he'd sent you in."

Christine raised her head in astonishment.

"Did he *scold* you?" she inquired.

"All he said to me was that I was the one who should be sent to my room," said Edith matter-of-factly. "He reminded me that I'm older than you and ought to have my temper under better control; he said that any one who displayed her feelings as plainly as I did, was utterly childish; and finally he told me that I ought to be ashamed of myself to vent my anger at my own carelessness on a dumb animal."

Christine stared, the tears still rolling down her cheeks.

"Were you—were you—furious?" she ventured.

This incomprehensible Edith laughed. She did not look as though she had ever been angry in her life. Her eyes were clear and sweet and the harsh, unlovely lines had vanished from around her mouth.

"I can always stand the truth," she declared. "I like Stan best when he won't take any non-

sense from me; but he has to be just. When he's unfair I could throw things at him. I've given his ring back twice because he has been so unreasonable."

Christine turned the gleaming diamond and emerald circlet on Edith's finger. Like all girls, Christine was fascinated by the hint of romance.

"Are you going to marry Uncle Stanley?" she asked shyly.

"We're engaged," Edith said seriously. "I'll be twenty in October and my people say I'm too young. Stan is years older than I am, but sometimes—I don't know——"

Her voice trailed off. Seated beside her, Christine watched the lovely, expressive face. Edith's eyes were fixed on the windows, she seemed to have forgotten Christine. The clock ticked swiftly on the dresser. Winks, from the rug, sighed luxuriously. Downstairs the piano sounded—a liquid running stream of silver notes that only Uncle Barry could pour out.

Suddenly Edith reached over and laid her hand across Christine's.

"I love him more than life itself!" she said

shakily, and her eyes were wet. "But never, never tell him I said so!"

She sprang up as a call came from the hall.

"Edith! Aren't you ever coming down?"

Edith opened the door a few inches.

"We'll be right down—and we'll want to be taken to the movies!" she cried gayly.

If Christine had not been sure beyond a doubt, she would have thought she had dreamed that last little speech and gesture Edith had made in confidence. For Edith laughed and talked incessantly the rest of the evening. She bathed Christine's blotched face with eau de cologne, put the merest dab of powder on her nose to hide its pinkness, and went with her downstairs to argue with Cousin Lo and Uncle Stanley, both of whom declared it too late for movies, and especially too late for Christine.

In the end Edith won and then devoted herself to Cousin Lo so pointedly that Christine had to entertain Uncle Stanley. She wished Uncle Barry could have gone with them, but he rarely left the house, never in the evening. It was eleven o'clock before they left the movie theater,

and Edith insisted on walking back to the house with Christine and Cousin Lo. She found a few minutes to whisper to Christine, "I'm sorry I was such a crab," and then Uncle Stanley whisked her away in the car which he had left at the curb.

"I think she's sweet!" exclaimed Christine, blinking a little in the light as she stood in Uncle Barry's study.

Cousin Lo had gone directly to the kitchen, to see whether Carolina had left it in good order.

"Edith Foster is very lovely in every way," said Uncle Barry, smiling. "You'll probably see a good deal of her this winter."

Christine saw a good deal of Edith in the next few days before school opened. Edith drove her own car and the way she covered ground was little short of amazing. She did the marketing for half the busy mothers in town, thinking nothing of taking half a dozen grocery lists and having them filled and bringing back the articles, in one morning. She "borrowed" Christine for several of these expeditions and took her, one afternoon, for a long drive down to the shore. They didn't get back till well after dark and

Cousin Lo said she would be glad when school opened, for then, she presumed, Christine would have something to do.

"You'll have to study every night, to keep up with Ramona," said Cousin Lo significantly. "She has been on the honor roll of the grammar school for four years."

Christine went out and sat on the back steps.

"If I can get off to school before that odious Ramona Haddon 'calls' for me, I'm going to do it," she informed Winks. "Watch me Monday morning."

And she sat there planning so earnestly that Carolina thought she looked hungry and brought her out a plate of raisin cookies.

CHAPTER VIII

THERE'S ALWAYS SCHOOL

"I THOUGHT I'd see if Christine was ready," said Jane Pine.

In a green linen dress, every red hair on her energetic head brushed till it shone, she stood on the front porch of the Carpenter house, talking to Miss Patchem through the screen door.

"Ramona Haddon is to call for Christine," said Cousin Lo stiffly.

"Well then I'll wait a few moments," observed Jane cheerfully.

She sat down on the top step as serenely as though she had been invited to come into the house; Christine, passing through the hall a few moments later, saw her there.

"Hello!" exclaimed Christine in surprise. "I didn't know you were here. Is it time to start for school?"

"You," Jane declared, "have to wait for Ramona."

"I certainly do not," said Christine. "Come on, let's go. I don't need a hat, do I?"

Jane glanced at her dubiously, but since Christine was already half-way down the lawn, she decided she might as well follow her.

"Don't you have to say good-by to anybody?" she asked, as she caught up with Christine.

Christine grinned and shook her head.

"Not this morning," she said easily.

The pleasant streets of Saxton had wakened to color and laughter with the opening of the school term. Gay groups of bare-headed girls loitered under the fine old shade trees, gathered at the corners, spilled from buses at the doorway of the school. Boys, already talking football, filled the large play yard at one side of the cream-brick building. A brand-new flag streamed from the gleaming white flagpole. Every one and everything had an air of being glad to start in again.

"Be sure you tell 'em your middle name," said Jane, as the two girls entered the wide doorway.

Jane had heard the story of "Lobelia" from Christine, and she could not forbear this slight thrust.

Christine made a face, then, finding herself opposite a solemn blank door with the word "Office" lettered on it, made haste to look more serious.

Getting registered was a matter of fifteen minutes or so, during which time Christine studied the boys and girls thronging in and out of the principal's office, with interest. As she turned away from filling out her registration card some one said, "Hello, so that's where it went!"

A boy with red curly hair, a generous sprinkling of freckles and the merriest blue eyes Christine had ever seen was staring at Jane. To be more exact, he was staring at the tie she wore with her green dress—a green and white striped four-in-hand that harmonized very nicely.

"Christine, this is my brother, Billy," explained Jane. "He's fussing because I borrowed one of his ties; it isn't his best one, either."

"Let me catch you taking my best tie!" threat-

ened Billy. "Do you girls want me to show you around?"

Jane said she thought they'd do without him and he scuttled away in answer to a summons from a short fat boy who stuck his head in the door and said "Hist!" to the visible annoyance of the principal's assistant, a young blond fellow who was having a trying morning.

Christine liked the principal, Mr. Hastings. She liked her teacher, Eloise Gurth, as the bulletin in the hall informed her. Miss Gurth taught one section of the freshman class and she proved to be, when Christine and Jane reached the classroom assigned them, a short, rather stocky, middle-aged woman, with a sense of humor and a refreshing absence of "nerves." She wore eyeglasses, dressed in perfect taste and had been, so Christine learned the first day, a champion sprinter in her college days. She looked now as though she enjoyed a wholesome amount of outdoor life.

The day sped by swiftly, filled with schedule adjustments, conferences, the issuing of books and supplies, a mass meeting of the freshman

class in the auditorium at which Mr. Hastings spoke briefly. Christine and Jane walked home together with assignments that would, Jane declared sadly, keep them busy all night.

"I can't see why they have to start the term with a bang," sighed Jane. "They ought to begin more gradually—accustom us to studying after vacation, you know. Why, lessons the first night can't help but be a shock to us after two months of rest."

Christine laughed. Jane didn't look as though that kind of shock would kill her. She looked, in fact, to be a remarkably healthy specimen of a school girl.

"I didn't see Ramona Haddon," said Christine, suddenly realizing that Cousin Lo's favorite had been nowhere in evidence.

"She wasn't there," Jane affirmed promptly. "Ramona is very temperamental—if she woke up and the air felt like a G or F string—or something—she would decide that she'd better not go to school till to-morrow."

That night at dinner Cousin Lo looked at Christine reprovingly.

"I wish after this you'd tell me when you leave for school," she said. "It's no way to do, to march off as though you were living in a boarding house; if Amelia hadn't happened to see you go, I might not have known where you had gone."

Across the steak he was carving, Uncle Stanley regarded Christine gravely.

"You seem to leave undone most of the things you ought to do," he suggested.

Christine's conscience wasn't clear, so she said nothing.

"Why didn't you come home to lunch?" asked Cousin Lo.

Christine shrank from this cross-questioning which Cousin Lo seemed to reserve for meal time.

"I like to stay at school," she answered. "Most of the girls do."

"There's no reason why Carolina should put up a lunch every day when you can come home if you don't waste the hour at noon," said Cousin Lo.

"I'll buy my lunch," Christine declared. "There's a place near the school——"

"Stanley, it's no fit place—Mrs. Haddon told me," protested Cousin Lo. "The girls fill up on sweet things. Ramona never goes there."

"The reason she doesn't, is because she can't find any one to go with her," Christine spoke very rapidly. "A girl who was in her class last year in grammar school told me—Ramona never treated once during the term and the girls got tired of treating her!"

Uncle Barry shifted a little wearily in his chair.

"Suppose we wait till after dinner," he said quietly. "I don't think hungry folk should try to argue."

Cousin Lo said she wasn't arguing, and Christine very nearly echoed her. But she *was* hungry and the steak was good and Carolina had made stuffed potatoes after her own pet recipe which had won a prize at the state fair. Christine wisely decided to follow Uncle Barry's advice, and the rest of the meal was finished in a fairly amiable atmosphere.

After dinner Christine withdrew rather hastily to her own room to study. She would have liked to have Winks but Cousin Lo, agreeing to let him come in the house "in the winter," made it a part of that agreement that he was not to be allowed in before frost.

"You might think he was a chrysanthemum," observed Christine indignantly and Uncle Barry, who heard her, shouted with laughter.

Uncle Barry spent hours each day, lying in his steamer chair. Even when it was fairly cold, he told Christine, he wrapped himself in a steamer rug and enjoyed the sun. She saw him now, in the fast gathering dusk—daylight saving made the day longer, but September told the story of approaching shorter days—lying motionless, under his favorite tree. She wondered, as she sat down to her tasks, what he thought about during the long hours.

She studied half an hour, then, ready to write out notes, discovered that she had no ink.

"I'll have to go down and get some," she thought ruefully.

Downstairs, she saw, through the screen door,

Cousin Lo on the porch, talking to some one, their rocking-chairs very close together. It was Mrs. Haddon. Uncle Stanley was playing with Winks on the front lawn—Christine told herself that the nicest thing about Uncle Stanley was his affection for her dog.

She turned toward Uncle Barry's study, knocked on the door half-absently—she thought he was still in the garden. But his voice said "Come in," and she pushed open the door to find him almost hidden in one of the easy chairs, a bridge lamp sending a stream of light upon the pages of his book.

"Could I have a little ink?" asked Christine politely.

"Want my fountain pen?" Uncle Barry suggested, reaching into his vest pocket. "Or there is an inkstand on the desk, if you prefer it."

Then, as Christine moved toward the desk, "Why don't you bring your lessons down here?" Uncle Barry asked.

"Down here?" echoed Christine. "Why, I have to *study!*"

Uncle Barry laughed.

"You may have my desk and the desk light," he told her. "I won't distract you; I want to read and if you speak to me, likely as not I'll bark right back at you. Seems to me the two students in this family ought to support each other."

Christine gazed at the broad desk, noticed the two inkwells, the apparently unlimited supply of pencils, erasers, the stacks of paper of varying size, color and texture. The double light, green-shaded, was tempting, too.

"I suppose I could come down," she murmured.

She went up after her books and a few minutes later was established at the study desk. Uncle Barry kept his word. He read as though unaware a second person was in the room. Christine, needing a dictionary once, glanced silently around and he pointed to a small revolving bookcase, just behind her. So he must have been watching her!

She found every conceivable kind of a reference book in the little bookcase—dictionaries,

grammars, a rhetoric. This was a gorgeous place to study! She congratulated herself.

She heard Mrs. Haddon saying good-by—her high-pitched voice carried through the house. Winks dropped down with a groan on the back porch and the sound of the car in the driveway announced that Uncle Stanley was presumably going to take Edith somewhere. Christine, studying valiantly, was yet aware of these sounds. Then the screen door slammed and Cousin Lo called her.

"I'm in here—in Uncle Barry's study!" answered Christine.

Cousin Lo pushed the door open with no uncertain hand.

"Poor Ramona wants you to bring her over the lessons for to-morrow," announced Cousin Lo. "She had to miss the first day because she didn't sleep last night. That's the reason she couldn't call for you."

CHAPTER IX

AN OVERNIGHT VISIT

"I CAN telephone them to her," said Christine.

"That won't be the same thing—take her your books and show her," Cousin Lo commanded.

"I'm not half through myself," argued Christine.

"Well, you must have been wasting time, then," returned Cousin Lo. "I want you take your books over to Ramona's house at once, Christine."

"The first day isn't important, lots of pupils miss it." Christine was determined not to yield easily.

"Well, Ramona will have to miss more than the first day," declared Cousin Lo. "The poor child has the measles."

Uncle Barry put down his book.

"Measles?" he repeated. "Then the house must be quarantined; how can Christine go there and take her books?"

"Oh, she must have had the measles," said Cousin Lo carelessly. "Nearly every child has them young; if Mrs. Haddon hadn't taken such marvelous care of Ramona she would have had them long ago."

Uncle Barry contemplated Christine.

"Hast had the measles?" he inquired seriously.

"No, sir," Christine responded demurely.

"That settles it, she's to stay away from the Haddons, till Ramona is out again," commanded Uncle Barry. "I only hope she doesn't come down with an attack, anyway; she must have been exposed when you took her to call on Ramona."

Cousin Lo murmured that she would have to tell Mrs. Haddon, and bustled away to the telephone, located in the hall, behind the stairs.

"Uncle Barry," said Christine persuasively, "Jane Pine wants me to spend the night with her some time soon; will you ask Cousin Lo to say it is all right?"

"I will not," her uncle replied promptly. "Do

your own asking is the rule in this house: ask her pretty, as the children say."

Christine sighed, fluttering the pages of her algebra.

"If you asked her, Cousin Lo would say 'yes,' " she insisted. "I don't think Cousin Lo likes Jane a whole lot."

"I hope," said Uncle Barry, his face in shadow, "that there is a grammatical course in the first year of Saxton High School; some of us need the drill. Your Cousin Lo likes people who don't deliberately antagonize her."

Christine bit her lip. She started to speak, then fell to studying furiously. She *didn't* deliberately antagonize Cousin Lo. And if she did, what about Cousin Lo's tactics?

"She wouldn't care if I got the measles and died," thought Christine wrathfully, "as long as Ramona had the lessons for to-morrow."

Christine was just closing the last one of her books when a flood of light swept the room, flickered, died down. The head lights of the car had streamed in at the windows, before Uncle Stanley dimmed them.

"Why, he didn't stay an hour!" exclaimed Christine in surprise.

Uncle Barry said nothing. He looked white and tired.

Christine expected Uncle Stanley would come in, but he didn't appear. When Cousin Lo came to tell her it was after nine and that she ought to be in bed, Christine moved stairward without argument, so engrossed was she in wondering where Uncle Stanley had gone and whether he had quarreled with Edith. She stood a moment in her room without turning the light and saw far down in the garden a glowing red spark that must be a cigar. Uncle Stanley was smoking out there alone in the dark. Presently she heard a step on the porch beneath her window—a faltering step. Then gravel crunching underfoot. Christine's eyes had grown more accustomed to the lack of light by now and she was able to make out a thin figure that limped down the path toward the glowing spark of light: Uncle Barry was going to sit with Uncle Stanley and perhaps talk with him.

In the next week or so, Christine had made

several adjustments. She felt at home in her school, knew dozens of her classmates, none of them as nice as Jane Pine, but good friends to laugh and play and study with; she knew her way around Saxton, knew the shops, the library, and of course, the two motion picture theaters. She would have gone to these latter with more frequency, had not her "budget" exacted a strict account of expenditures. Uncle Stanley went over the items not casually, but intently, and had limited the "movies" to Friday nights and Saturday afternoons. At that Christine had more pocket money than most of the girls in school and she frequently shared it with Jane, as far as that red-headed young person would permit her, for Jane never had any money.

Christine was adapting herself to her new home, too, not, alas, with the ease and grace of a tactful, forgiving personality, but with honesty and a determination to play fair, qualities that are of high value in themselves. She and Cousin Lo battled over nearly every question, but Uncle Stanley was usually just, Uncle Barry always, and Amelia and Carolina frankly thought every-

thing Christine did or said was exactly right. Such adulation wasn't good for her, of course, but then, as Uncle Barry whimsically observed, perhaps she had more criticism than was good for her, too.

Jane continued to ask Christine to come and spend the night with her and one day she clinched her persuasions with what she considered a perfect argument.

"You can hold our baby and then, in the practice house, Miss Allison will give you 'A' for not being awkward," said Jane. "The girls who know how to pick up a baby and how to put it down, are going to be far ahead of the girls who've never had any experience."

This "practice house" was the talk of the school. It was an innovation that year, the gift of a wealthy resident of Saxton who believed that too much "book education" didn't fit girls to take their proper places in the world.

"They'll be wives and mothers, most of them," said Mrs. Voget, "and why not let them learn to keep house, instead of learning so much algebra?"

So, to test her theory, she had built and equipped completely, a charming little house in which every girl in the Saxton High School was to have a six weeks' course. The girls moved in by the half dozen and each in turn was cook, waitress, mistress, nurse, mother and visitor, allowing one week for each character part. They even slept in the house for one week. The upper classes were to have the first trial and the rest of the school looked forward eagerly as their turns drew nearer.

"I think they ought to have a course for the boys," Christine confided to Uncle Barry. "They ought to teach them to tend the furnace and mow the lawn and put washers on the faucets. Oh, yes, and put in the screens and pay mortgages and things like that."

Uncle Barry smiled delightedly. He and Christine often exchanged ideas on "education" and now he said that he hadn't a doubt a course in how to pay off mortgages would do the boys a great deal of good.

"What in the world do you know about mort-

gages?" demanded Cousin Lo, who had overheard.

"There was a mortgage on our house and my Grandma told me about it," Christine explained with dignity.

"I think the eternal discussion of money is grubby beyond words," declared Cousin Lo loftily.

Christine, by this time, knew more of Cousin Lo's position in the household. She had not a relative in the world beyond the two Carpenters who were distant cousins of hers. Cousin Lo's family had died off, one by one, leaving her heavily saddled with debts. Uncle Barry and Uncle Stanley had answered her letter pleading for assistance, by paying the bills, had brought Cousin Lo to Saxton and established her as housekeeper in their home at a liberal salary. And Cousin Lo could say it was "grubby" to discuss money!

Urged, more by her desire to meet Jane's family and sleep with her in her room than by any idea of learning how to hold the youngest member of the Pine family, Christine finally

asked Cousin Lo if she might go and stay one night with Jane. Ramona Haddon was still quarantined and Cousin Lo spent an hour each night at the phone, talking to her mother.

"Why, if your uncles have no objections, I suppose it is all right," said Cousin Lo in answer to Christine's question. "But you must ask them. I can't be responsible for your restlessness."

"What about lessons?" said Uncle Stanley the instant he heard of the plan.

"We'll study—honestly," Christine promised. "Jane's mother makes her and Billy study every night."

"Will you be home to breakfast?" asked Uncle Stanley—he had a way of going straight to the heart of things. Uncle Barry merely leaned back in his chair and listened.

"Oh, no, we're going to school right from Jane's house," Christine explained.

"All right," said Uncle Stanley briefly.

Christine didn't mention the fact that Winks had also been invited, till Uncle Stanley had left for the city. To her surprise, Uncle Barry instantly vetoed that plan.

"Don't take Winks where there is a baby," he cautioned. "He isn't used to children and you can't tell how he'll act. Mrs. Pine will not be glad to see a strange dog, no matter how cordial she tries to be to you about it."

Christine went home from school with Jane the next afternoon. She had met Jane's mother once in the garden and Billy, of course, she knew in school. But she had never seen Grandma Footing, nor the lovely dark-haired baby Grace, nor Nina, slim and pretty and amazingly industrious. Mr. Pine came in, just as they were sitting down to dinner and Christine liked the way he put his arm around his wife and kissed her, before he went to his own place at the head of the table.

Nina and Jane took turns waiting on the table and Christine thoroughly enjoyed the pleasant, deliciously cooked meal. She sat quietly looking from one to the other and wishing she had brothers and sisters, when Jane asked her laughingly what she was thinking.

"I thought you said you had three brothers," said Christine, puzzled.

"Bobby and Georgie," Jane supplied promptly. "I forgot them; they're spending the night with our other grandmother."

After dinner, Christine, Jane and Billy sat down to study. Nina helped with the dishes, then went up to her room to sew. Mr. Pine, with the explanation that it was "Association" night, vanished. Grandma Footing, in a room across the hall, nodded over her newspaper and Mrs. Pine went upstairs with the two-year-old Grace.

Christine sensed the wholesome, happy atmosphere of this plain house, as she studied. The furniture was shabby, the wallpaper faded, but every room looked as though people lived in it happily. Each had a corner of his own in the living room and it didn't take much imagination to picture them grouped around the fireplace in the winter time.

After the girls went up to bed, they lay awake talking for an hour or so, as was only natural. They talked of school, and of the practice house; about the winter sports that could be enjoyed in Saxton; about their clothes; a little about Uncle

Stanley and Edith Foster, for Jane, too, dearly loved a romance; and they also talked about Ramona Haddon and her guitar.

By and by, though, they fell asleep. Christine was dreaming that Winks had her dress and was shaking it roughly—she tried to push him away—she scolded him—then she sat up with a start.

Jane was leaning over her, shaking her by the shoulder.

"There's a burglar in the house!" hissed Jane earnestly. "Get up and help me find him."

Christine's tendency to argue ran true to form.

"How do you know there's a burglar in the house?" she asked in an indignant whisper.

"I heard him," Jane answered convincingly. "He's after the Association's money!"

CHAPTER X

HOW TO CATCH A BURGLAR

CHRISTINE didn't know what the Association was, nor what money it had, nor what the money was doing in the Pine house. But she was quite willing to help Jane capture a burglar; Christine had never seen a burglar and she shivered delightedly at the idea of surprising one.

"Where's the money?" she asked practically.

"I'm not sure where it is," said Jane in a loud whisper. "Dad always brings it home with him to put in the bank the next morning. He must have left it downstairs."

Christine slid cautiously out of bed.

"Well, come on," she urged. "Haven't you a gun or something?"

Jane had no gun.

"I think the best way to do is to creep up on

him and hit him with a—a—chair," she suggested.

Christine had no better method to offer and they made their way to the door. The air was decidedly chilly and the girls wrapped their dressing gowns tightly around them. Out in the hall Christine was startled to hear a mysterious little "clink."

"I wish we had Winks," she whispered. "He could scare the burglar away."

"We don't want to scare him, we want to capture him," reproved Jane. "He's probably counting the money now."

Christine jumped and clutched Jane's arm in the darkness.

"Something hit me on the foot!" gasped Christine.

"Clink! Clink!" the mysterious noise sounded softly again.

The Pines slept with their bedroom doors closed and the girls heard the various doors rattling gently in the rising wind. The clinking came, apparently from one room where the door had not been closed.

"Why, that noise isn't downstairs," said Jane, barely above her breath. "It's in the guest room!"

She started bravely for that room, at the upper end of the hall, but when she reached the doorway, she hung back.

"Come on, we have to catch him," Christine reminded her.

In danger or excitement, Christine plunged ahead, exhilarated, rather than dismayed. She stepped into the blackness of the room and Jane followed her fearfully.

For a moment they heard nothing. Then, "Clink!"—a coin rolled across the bare floor and apparently ended its journey in the nap of one of the rugs.

This *was* too much for Jane and she screamed, "Daddy!"

Her father's voice answered, the hall light flashed on; the entire Pine family tumbled out of the bedrooms and in another moment the guest room was flooded with light for Billy had touched the switch.

"What in the world!" cried Mrs. Pine anxiously. "Are you sick, Janey, darling?"

Christine and Jane were staring about them. There was no burglar. There was nothing unusual about the pretty, neat guest room, except a blue smock hung across the foot of the bed.

"I thought a burglar was stealing the Association money," explained Jane sheepishly. "We *did* hear money clinking, didn't we, Christine?"

Christine nodded. She was eying the smock. Even as she stared, a gust of wind came in at the open window, blew the lower half of the smock up—and across the floor rolled a shining new dime.

"My carfare and lunch money!" cried Nina, darting forward to retrieve the dime.

"Gee, what a sell!"—this from Billy.

He began to laugh, but Jane was frankly puzzled.

"I dressed to go out in here," explained Nina, "after dinner. I knew I'd need my laboratory smock to-morrow, so I put it out where I wouldn't forget it and put the change I had in the pockets, too. But I did forget it—I un-

dressed in my own room and went to bed and never even remembered I'd left the window open in here."

"The wind blew the hem of the smock up, Jane," Mr. Pine said. "And that tilted the pockets, so the change rolled out. Anyway, Daughter, I left the Association money in Mr. Anderson's safe this time."

Every one went back to bed after that. Jane whispered to Christine that Billy would probably "guy" them unmercifully in the morning. And Christine, who wasn't a bit sleepy, learned that the "Association" was the savings and mutual benefit organization of the firm for which Mr. Pine worked. It met twice a month and the employees paid their dues and the treasurer, who was Mr. Pine, put it in the bank in the name of the Association.

"Mother never liked him to bring the money home, so I suppose he left it in Mr. Anderson's safe to please her," whispered Jane sleepily. "Well, I certainly thought a burglar was after it."

Christine had thought so, too, but she decided

it was really very comfortable to be back in the soft bed and to be able to go to sleep without worrying about money or burglars. She heard Jane's soft breathing and then in another moment she herself was asleep and the next thing the girls knew some one had knocked at their door.

"All right, we're getting up," said Jane automatically.

Christine laughed: Jane hadn't even opened her eyes. But a few moments later the door was pushed open and the baby, Grace, toddled in. She carried a package wrapped in brown paper.

"Hello, darling," said Jane, still in bed.

Christine was dressing and she lifted Grace up on the bed beside Jane.

"Tell your sister she's a lazy-bones," she instructed the smiling baby.

"Present," said Grace, holding out the package.

Jane opened it in haste.

"I told you so!" she cried a moment later, in great disgust. "Billy will never let us forget last night—never. Look!"

She held out a mousetrap, on which was tacked a card, lettered in black letters: "Newest device for catching burglars."

Christine laughed again.

"I think it was funny, too," she admitted. "Every time I think of you and me creeping down the hall after that thief, I could chuckle; we didn't even have a flash light."

Jane said she didn't see anything funny in it, but at the breakfast table she had to give in and admit that perhaps there were things she could do better than capturing burglars.

"Next time, come and get me, Daughter," suggested Mr. Pine kindly, "or Billy; we're anxious to protect the family fortunes, too."

Christine and Jane went off to school, to endure Billy's good-natured teasing with the best grace they could muster. That night Christine told Uncle Barry, who laughed over the story and agreed that in situations like that a dog was a great help and comfort.

"I think Jane's family are *sweet!*" declared Christine. "They want me to come and spend the night with them again, soon."

Uncle Barry said he was sure she could go again some time which was encouraging, if vague.

It was Cousin Lo who told Christine a few days later that Ramona Haddon had recovered from her illness and would be back in school shortly.

"Her mother asked me whether you wouldn't spend the night with her soon, and I said yes," Cousin Lo went on. "Ramona is anxious to find out a little about the lessons she's missed. Of course she couldn't use her eyes while she was sick and she must still be careful."

Christine had no desire to spend the night with Ramona. Yet if she wanted or expected Cousin Lo to be pleasant about the next invitation from Jane Pine, the sensible thing to do, of course, was to go and visit Ramona amicably.

"I only hope she doesn't ask me Tuesday night," said Christine anxiously, "because Wednesday is my hardest day; we have math the first period in the morning."

"Oh, Ramona will *study,*" Cousin Lo assured her. "She's very studious; her mother told me

she's wept herself almost blind, thinking of the work she's lost and must make up before the end of the term."

Ramona did telephone for Christine the next Tuesday. She wanted her to come "right from school," but Uncle Barry had set that afternoon for his first piano lesson and nothing would have induced Christine to miss that. She had a happy hour at the piano, changed her frock and, taking her books, set off for Ramona's a little before five o'clock.

It was a gorgeous early October afternoon and Christine hated to go indoors. She hoped Ramona would at least consent to sit out on the porch, but Ramona declared it was too cold and she preferred to huddle over the fire in the living room.

"I wish I didn't have to go to school tomorrow," she said petulantly.

"Oh, week after next is our turn in the practice house," Christine informed her. "That will be heaps of fun."

"I don't think it's much fun to be the girl who has to be the maid," grumbled Ramona.

"My mother thinks it's a silly idea, too; she says I won't ever have to be a servant, so why must I practice being one?"

"Miss Gurth says it's so we can tell our maids what to do, if we ever keep house and have maids," explained Christine.

While they were still arguing over this question, dinner was announced. Mr. and Mrs. Haddon didn't say much during the meal, but they listened to Ramona, who talked a great deal. And when her mother said that she and "Daddy" were going across the street to visit friends, Ramona said she and Christine would go to the movies.

"Oh, I can't, I have to study," protested Christine. "Algebra is my worst lesson and we have it first period. You'll be excused, because you've been absent, but Mr. Fuerth will never overlook me."

"You can study after we get back," Ramona said carelessly. "This is the early show and we'll be home by nine."

Christine waited till they had left the table, before she reminded Ramona that her mother

had said she wanted her to go over the lessons she had missed during her illness.

"I have to be careful of my eyes," was Ramona's answer. "I can get the back stuff in a couple of weeks, anyway: Miss Gurth will coach me."

Christine thought that the movies would be as hard on Ramona's weak eyes as any book could be, but she wisely forbore to say so. Instead she promised herself to study after they returned to the house and it must be admitted that she went cheerfully to the motion picture theater. Ramona's father had given her two dollars just before they left the house.

"There's Miss Foster," said Ramona as she handed their tickets to the usher.

Going down the aisle just ahead of her, with another young woman, Christine saw Edith Foster's graceful head. "I hope she doesn't see us," she thought uneasily.

CHAPTER XI

NOTHING GOES RIGHT

THEY were just in time for the "first run," indeed, before they reached their seats the lights went out, so Christine could not see where Edith sat. Even in the intermission, though she looked around, she saw nothing of Edith.

When the program was over, Ramona, to Christine's surprised and ill-concealed chagrin, announced that she meant to see the comedy a second time.

"Oh, we can't!" protested Christine. "It doesn't come till after the main picture, Ramona, and I have all my studying to do."

"Well, you can go back and study, if you like," Ramona said coolly. "I'm going to stay here."

She didn't mention that she had bought the tickets and that Christine was her guest, but she

might just as well have said so. Christine knew that she couldn't go off and leave Ramona alone in the theater.

After the main picture and the comedy, Ramona said, with some truth, that they might just as well stay for the current events. So it was nearly eleven when they came out to the brightly lighted lobby.

"Let's go have a soda," suggested Ramona who seemed to want to do anything else except go home.

Christine knew that she would not be able to study now, and she *was* thirsty. So she followed Ramona to the hot, bright little candy store where they each chose an elaborate fruit and nut sundae instead of the soda—Ramona declared she had been cooped up in the house so long she had forgotten what a sundae tasted like.

"Won't your father and mother worry about you?" asked Christine, eying the clock on the store wall a trifle apprehensively.

Ramona followed the direction of her gaze. "They won't worry, but we might as well go," she said, rising. Mr. and Mrs. Haddon were

waiting in the living room. They had worried—Christine knew that. But all they said was that they thought Ramona meant to be home by nine o'clock.

"I wanted to see one of the pictures a second time," Ramona declared, as though that explained everything.

Ramona had a beautiful room with every appointment her doting parents could provide. But Christine, too sleepy to enjoy its luxury, could only wish that Ramona would ever stop talking. For what seemed to her hours and hours —though it could not have been longer than an hour at the most—Ramona sat up in bed, after the light was out, and talked. She demanded answers, too, and Christine had to rouse herself to answer "Yes," or "No," or "Do you think so?" When Ramona's voice finally died down, Christine fell asleep with almost indecent promptness, as Ramona informed her the next morning.

"I can't help it, I get sleepy," apologized Christine, brushing her hair and wondering what she would do if called upon during the algebra period.

Ramona proceeded to dress reluctantly, ate her breakfast languidly, and debated so long whether she should go to school or put it off for another day, that Christine was on the verge of leaving without her.

"I suppose I might as well go," decided Ramona, and Christine hustled her down the path before she could change her mind.

Nothing went right that day in school. Christine was called upon to recite in algebra class and flunked ignominiously. She had forgotten that this was the last day to hand in a required English theme, and hers was not ready. She had promised the botany teacher a specimen of a late flower from Uncle Barry's garden and of course she hadn't brought it. And she had to spend both her study periods copying out notes for Ramona who said she wanted to bring her English notebook up to date and she thought Christine might help her that much!

Christine walked home with Jane at half-past two, filled with the resolve to "study her head off" that night. She had to practice an hour —Uncle Barry, for all his gentleness was firm

on that point—and then she went up town to the store for Carolina and met Jane and Grace and helped them buy a dozen eggs and two loaves of bread and carry them home. Jane could have a good time whether she was buying a new dress, or something to be cooked for supper.

The girls couldn't hurry, because Grace walked slowly, and when Christine reached home she found that Edith Foster had arrived for dinner. She and Uncle Stanley were in the living room and Uncle Barry was playing softly. Christine hurried out to the kitchen and gave the butter to Carolina. Cousin Lo was stirring something in a pan—she was fond of Edith and her way of showing her affection was to make extra preparations for the dinner.

"I know Edith would come oftener, if Cousin Lo didn't insist on wearing herself to a nervous frazzle," thought Christine, speeding upstairs to her own room to freshen up.

"Edith would like to drop into dinner, like one of the family. I suppose it's partly because she always looks lovely herself, that she makes people feel like fussing for her."

The gong sounded while Christine was scrubbing her hands, and she went down to find the others just going in to dinner.

"I saw you at the movies last night, but you didn't see me," remarked Edith, as Amelia brought in the soup.

Something in Christine's face must have warned her, for she instantly looked distressed.

"Shouldn't I have mentioned it?" she faltered.

Before the words were hardly out of her mouth, Uncle Stanley interposed.

"It would have been better if Christine had mentioned it," he said coldly, "but we'll leave the discussion of that till after dinner, if you don't mind, Edith."

Edith shot another distressed look at Christine, but forbore to argue. Cousin Lo apparently had not heard the conversation, for her mind had been intent on Amelia's service. With every one served, for the moment Cousin Lo felt free to give her attention to her guest.

"Christine spent the night with Ramona Haddon," she said brightly. "She's such a lovely girl. You ought to hear her sing."

"I think she's a spoiled brat," Edith announced with deplorable frankness.

"That is a word I never allow any one to use in my hearing," declared Cousin Lo with positively glacial stiffness.

"Sorry," apologized Edith sulkily.

She really wasn't much older than herself, Christine reflected, watching Edith's willful, charming face. Uncle Stanley glanced at her with almost the same reproving look he bestowed on Christine—but Edith didn't care how much Uncle Stanley glared at her. The emerald and diamond ring flashed as she raised her fork.

"I bought a first edition to-day," said Uncle Barry, in his cultivated, calm voice. "Page brought it in to me; there's another volume, missing, which gave me this at a bargain price. Page is going to try to get me the other volume and if he does, the pair will be practically priceless."

Edith rose to his efforts. The talk switched to books and the dinner moved ahead pleasantly. It was too cold to have coffee in the garden now: instead they had it in Uncle Barry's study and he showed them his prize book, a fat little square

volume, bound in faded red cloth. He also explained the marks which identified it as a first edition and from that he went on to tell other stories about his collection of books, till, the coffee finished, Amelia came in and carried away the service. Cousin Lo followed her, intent on washing her precious gold-banded cups herself.

"Well, if we're going to the Painters', we'd better start," suggested Uncle Stanley.

Christine was about to excuse herself and go up to her room to study, when Edith spoke firmly.

"I'm not going if you're going to scold Christine for what I said."

Christine, near the door, halted in astonishment.

"Are you?" persisted Edith.

"I'll handle this, if you please, Edith," Uncle Stanley announced.

"I ought never to open my mouth." Edith almost wept. "I don't know why you should act so cross, simply because Christine went to the movies with that horrid little Ramona Haddon, but if you scold her I'll never forgive you."

"Christine, go upstairs," directed Uncle Stanley curtly.

As she closed the door after her, Christine heard him say, "Now you're acting like a child."

She found it difficult to settle down to her lessons, but she knew that she couldn't risk another wasted evening. She was deep in Latin grammar, when she heard the engine of the car start. She glanced at her watch: it had taken Uncle Stanley three-quarters of an hour to make his peace with Edith.

"Anyway, she doesn't like Ramona," Christine comforted herself. "I wish I knew what in the world it is that Cousin Lo sees in that girl."

CHAPTER XII

CONSEQUENCES

"BUT you're not fair!" said Christine.

She faced Uncle Stanley across the study desk the next evening, and her cheeks were blazing.

"You're entitled to your viewpoint," Uncle Stanley answered evenly, "but that doesn't necessarily prove your contention."

"Because I went to the movies with Ramona Haddon, you won't let me spend the night with Jane Pine for a month!" stormed Christine.

"Try to control your voice," her uncle advised sternly. "I have said that you are not to stay overnight with any girl for the next month; I trusted you to study and it seems you're not to be trusted."

At that moment Christine's dislike for Ramona was a violent emotion. To think that, because Ramona was too lazy to study, she,

Christine, could not go and visit Jane Pine for a month at least!

"Why didn't you tell me you went to the movies?" asked Uncle Stanley, breaking in on her seething thoughts.

Christine was silent.

"There's no reason why you shouldn't have your friends to visit you," said Uncle Stanley, more kindly. "You'll have to study, of course, unless you ask them on a Friday night. Why don't you have this Jane Pine some Friday night and take her to the movies—since that seems to be the thing to do?"

"I *could* do that," Christine agreed, beginning to feel better. "Jane adores the movies."

She left the study, intending to go up to her lessons, but stopped in the hall a moment to listen to Uncle Barry who was playing. Unfortunately Cousin Lo came out of the kitchen just then: unfortunately, because the impulsive Christine acted at once upon Uncle Stanley's permission.

"Uncle Stanley says I may have Jane spend Friday night with me," she announced. "A

Friday night, he said; is it all right if I ask her for this Friday, Cousin Lo?"

"Why don't you ask Ramona first?" Cousin Lo suggested.

This was too much. Later, when she had cooled down, Christine told herself that a perfect angel couldn't have met that suggestion with anything like calm.

"I won't ask Ramona!" flared Christine. "I don't like her."

"She took you to the movies and proved herself a charming hostess," said Cousin Lo, who must have been guessing, for how could she, reasoned Christine, know what kind of a hostess Ramona had been?

"She made a mess of the evening for me," Christine scolded. "It's all her fault that I can't go anywhere for a month. She's just what Edith Foster called her—a spoiled brat!"

"How dare you——" Cousin Lo, her face flushed, took a step forward.

And behind her Christine felt a touch on her arm—Uncle Barry had limped to the doorway.

But the study door was flung open, too, and Uncle Stanley came out.

"Stanley, I won't be talked to as Christine has spoken to me!" declared Cousin Lo, dabbing at her eyes with her handkerchief.

"I heard your voice, Christine, and it wasn't very pleasant," said Uncle Stanley gravely. "What is the trouble now?"

"She wants to ask that Pine girl here and she refuses to invite Ramona Haddon," Cousin Lo informed him tartly.

Christine, watching, saw that Uncle Stanley's mouth twitched.

"Well, you can hardly expect Christine to ask Ramona right away," said Uncle Stanley levelly. "We'll have to let Christine be her own hostess, I think, Cousin Lo."

"But she was so rude to me," insisted Cousin Lo.

"Ask your cousin's pardon and then go up and study, Christine," Uncle Stanley directed.

Uncle Barry went back to the piano, not having spoken a word. Christine often marveled at his silence. She apologized with the best grace

she could to Cousin Lo, and sped upstairs. Into the middle of the bed she tumbled, intending to have a little cry, but before she had cried three briny drops, a rough, loving little tongue began to lick her hand, hanging over one side of the bed.

"Winks, you dear, darling Winks!" whispered Christine joyfully. "Who let you in? I bet it was Uncle Barry!"

Winks couldn't give away the secret, of course, but he and Christine had a heart-to-heart talk, after their own fashion, and then Winks' mistress tackled the algebra and Latin, the grammar and the history, without stopping to think of what she vaguely termed her "misfortunes." As for Winks, he curled up on the rug and went to sleep and grunted satisfied grunts from time to time.

As it happened, Jane couldn't come that Friday and the next week Christine found her name on the bulletin board as one of the six drawn for the practice house. Jane was another, Ramona Haddon a third.

"Just my luck!" thought Christine, studying the list.

The other three girls—Frances Newcome, Dora Berry and Sally Morris—Christine knew slightly.

"What fun!" said Jane interestedly, coming up behind Christine. "It will be just like visiting, won't it?"

"When do we go?" Christine asked thoughtfully.

"To-morrow," returned Jane. "We don't sleep in the house till the last week, but we go there for lunch—we get a two-hour period—and we have to report there right after school. And all day Saturday; in a way it's a kind of a nuisance, but the girls say it is a lot of fun, too."

All the talk that day, among the six girls named for the practice house, of course, centered around what would be done there, the baby, who was "borrowed," as Jane expressed it, for Saturdays, and who would be the first "head of the house."

"You mean lady of the house," corrected Christine. "All the agents who ring door-bells say, 'Is the lady of the house in?' "

Miss Gurth saw each one of the girls during

the day and gave them further instructions. They were to go to the practice house, a block from the school, at noon the next day, reporting to Miss Allison, the home economics teacher. Their schedules would be arranged so that the extra time spent at the house would be allowed for. Saturday work was optional, but if the girls wished a certificate, they would have to be present every Saturday for the full course.

"I wouldn't miss a Saturday for anything," said Jane to Christine. "All I ask of life is to see Ramona Haddon washing the dishes."

Christine laughed and reminded Jane that they might be washing the dishes instead of Ramona.

"Well, sooner or later she'll wash dishes," said Jane confidently. "You simply have to take turns and Miss Allison is very strict about it. Now I've washed tons of dishes at home and a dish pan is no novelty to me, but I'll bet Ramona doesn't know a dish-cloth when she sees it."

Cousin Lo didn't approve of the practice house. She said that if Christine wished to learn housework, there was plenty to do right at home.

"You never let me do anything," protested

Christine, who never would learn to hold her tongue. "Carolina and Amelia do everything and when I try to help you say to run away and you can do it better yourself."

Cousin Lo said that any girl who really desired to be of use, could find a way. And she declared that Christine must rise an hour earlier and do her practicing in the morning.

"Of course it will disturb the entire house, but it seems that this new-fangled idea of housework at school is more important than anything else," she finished majestically.

Uncle Barry's glance checked Christine's retort. Uncle Barry said that practicing simply couldn't disturb him and that Uncle Stanley wouldn't even hear it.

"I'd say let the music go till the six weeks are over," he said pleasantly; "except that you're making such excellent progress, I don't like to have it interrupted."

Before they left the dinner table the phone rang and Amelia came back to say that Miss Ramona wanted to speak to Miss Christine.

"Tell her Miss Christine will call her later,"

said Uncle Stanley before Cousin Lo could speak.

It was one of his inflexible rules that the telephone must not break into the regular meal hours.

"I wonder what she wants," thought Christine and promptly forgot Ramona till an hour later the phone rang again and Uncle Barry called to her to come down and speak to Ramona.

CHAPTER XIII

PRACTICE HOUSE

"HELLO!" said Ramona's shrill voice as Christine picked up the receiver. "I thought you were going to call me back—I suppose you forgot it. I wanted to ask you something—the girls say we draw lots at the practice house for the first positions: after that we rotate. Well, if I draw the cook's or maid's job first, will you swap with me?"

"But how do you know you'll like the position I draw any better?" argued Christine.

"As long as it isn't cook or maid, I don't care," Ramona declared. "I'm not very strong yet and I can't—I just can't—endure grubby work. You trade with me, and then, after the first week, I will be stronger and I won't care."

"All right," promised Christine, hanging up the receiver disgustedly.

There was nothing the matter with Ramona.

She had had a light case of measles, in the first place. She liked to baby and coddle herself. She hated the idea of putting her fingers into dishwater. She was spoiled—"a spoiled brat," Edith Foster called her. Christine, reciting this list of shortcomings fiercely as she sped back to her room, found herself unexpectedly giggling. She had remembered Uncle Stanley's face as Edith expressed her opinion of Ramona.

However, the girls had reckoned without Miss Allison. The next noon, when the half dozen trooped into the spic and span little practice house, an eight-room, compactly built, completely furnished cream and green house, set on a wide plot, the economics teacher met them, six slips of paper in her hand.

"I'll put these face down on the table and each of you is to step up and take one," said Miss Allison.

She was a tiny woman, with fuzzy, bright hair and gold-rimmed glasses. She wore an immaculate blue and white checked gingham and a rose-colored apron. Just to look at her, you'd know

she could keep house "with one hand tied behind her," as Jane Pine said.

Miss Allison laid her six slips of paper down on the table in an orderly row.

"I'll choose," cried Ramona, and started forward.

She snatched a piece of paper, looked at it and scowled.

"Cook!" she snorted, in such evident disgust that the other girls laughed.

"Don't you forget what you promised," Ramona whispered to Christine.

Jane Pine drew next—her slip read "waitress"; then Frances Newcome, to her own horror, drew the slip marked "Mother"—Frances wailed that she was afraid of babies. Christine's turn was next. Her slip was for "Visitor." Ramona beamed with satisfaction. The other two "jobs," went, of course, to the two remaining girls: Dora Berry, fat and good-natured, if rather lazy, was to be "lady of the house" and Sally Morris the nurse.

"Now I want to say one thing at the start," remarked Miss Allison briskly, "there is to be

absolutely no exchange of places. I don't want any girl to come to me and suggest that she 'trade' places with another; I shall not consent. You are to retain your present positions for a week and then rotate automatically. I'll take you over the house first."

Christine dared not look at Ramona. She would be furious! As Miss Allison led them through the pretty rooms, each in perfect order, the girls discussed their ideas with more or less frankness.

"I won't have a thing to do!" chuckled Dora.

"You certainly will," Christine informed her. "You'll have to make it pleasant for your guests: I expect you to ask me what I like to eat and whether I prefer my breakfast in bed."

"You're lucky if you get anything to eat," suggested Jane significantly.

"I'm the one who won't have a thing to do," Sally declared. "I'm the nurse and there won't be any one to nurse till the baby comes Saturday."

Frances brightened up at that.

"I won't have to be mother to any one, either, till then," she announced.

Miss Allison made no comment till she had them seated at the luncheon table in the dining room. She explained that she cooked lunch the first day for each new group, but after that the girls must cook and serve it.

"We look after two youngsters from the Fresh Air Home every afternoon," remarked Miss Allison casually, as she passed the pretty plates. "This gives the mother and the nurse in our groups plenty of occupation."

Frances and Sally very nearly groaned. It seemed that Miss Allison had not overlooked a single point. The Fresh Air Home was on the outskirts of Saxton and was open all the year. Poor children from the city were received there and they were of all ages.

"Well, I see where we work," remarked Jane as the girls trudged back to school.

"Christine is the only one who gets any rest," Sally declared.

"A guest can't just sit around and do nothing

while every one else works," said Ramona spitefully. "She'll have to do something."

Each one of the girls looked forward to the afternoon with curiosity. School was out at half past two and they were to report by three at the practice house and stay till five. As a matter of fact, they were all on hand by quarter of three and fifteen minutes later had started their actual work.

"Afternoon tea," Miss Allison announced, would be the program. The cook was to prepare it, the waitress help serve it; the visitor and the lady of the house must grace the living room; the nurse, the mother and the children were to attend.

"Those kids will probably upset the tea wagon," said Jane pessimistically, as soon as she saw the children.

They were a little girl and boy about four years old, with bright, dark eyes, dressed in clean clothes so patched that Christine was sure no shred of the original material remained.

"Come on in and be entertained," said Dora hastily to Christine.

Christine looked at the fireplace.

"Wouldn't it be nice to have a little fire?" she suggested.

Dora looked exasperated.

"The wood's down in the cellar," she explained. "I don't see how I can ask any one to go after it—they're all busy."

"Why don't you go?" said Christine sweetly, from the depths of a comfortable chair.

"What an awful guest you're going to be," scolded poor Dora. "Don't you ever think of anything except your own comfort?"

"Not when I'm visiting," Christine confessed blandly.

Dora went off reluctantly to fetch the necessary kindling, but she had her revenge. Hardly had she left the room, when the two children, accompanied by the harassed looking Sally Morris, charged into view.

"Tell us a story!" the children demanded, flinging themselves upon Christine. "Tell us a story. Dora said you would. She said the visiting lady would tell us a story."

All visitors to the Fresh Air Home were sup-

posed to bring a supply of stories with them. The youngsters there were accustomed to attention and they expected callers to amuse them.

"Wait till I get hold of Dora!" thought Christine wrathfully, but aloud she said, "All right—sit down and keep as still as mice and I'll tell you a story."

Dora came up with the wood and dropped it noisily on the hearth; Frances wandered in, looking perfectly lost with a huge mending basket in her hands. Miss Allison, she explained, had set her to darning; apparently the week's supply of socks for the children of the Fresh Air Home was contained in that basket. Frances said pessimistically that they would never ask her to darn but once—any one who had ever worn stockings with humps in them, and her darns always made humps, would not ask her to sew a second time.

"Miss Allison inspects your sewing and you'll have to rip it out, if it isn't good," said Christine, interrupting her story.

"Now there's your fire," Dora declared, rising from her knees, as the blaze flared cheerfully.

"I think you ought to go and see what is the

matter with the tea," suggested Christine, mindful of the story trick and seeing a chance to pay Dora in her own coin.

"Yes, a good hostess always oversees her maids," added Frances.

Sally was sitting demurely on a hassock, apparently the well-trained nursemaid. She brightened up at the suggestion of something to eat.

"I don't see why you are all so anxious to think up something for me to do," grumbled Dora, but she went out to the kitchen.

"If there's going to be any afternoon tea, they'd better hurry," observed Sally, glancing at her wrist watch.

"And the fairy stopped picking roses and said, 'What time is it?' " Christine said seriously.

Sally laughed and the little boy and girl looked puzzled as well they might. This story Christine was telling them was like no fairy story they had ever heard before.

"It's after four," said Sally, "and we have to go at five."

Christine wound up her story and said she didn't know any more.

"It's the mother's place to tell stories, anyway," she asserted.

Frances, frowning over a jagged hole in a sock, murmured that she had troubles of her own.

Dora came back, looking worried.

"Ramona is acting like the—like the dickens," she confided. "She's spilled water all over the floor, from filling the tea kettle, and Miss Allison made her mop it up. Jane has the tea wagon all ready, but there's nothing to put on it. Ramona is supposed to be making sandwiches, but she gets mad every time Miss Allison shows her what to do."

However, twenty minutes or so later, the broadly smiling Jane, a saucy strip of muslin pinned across her hair, a little white apron over her frock, wheeled in the tea wagon. Miss Allison followed and supervised the serving. The brown-eyed hostess was inclined to get excited and she nearly poured the tea over her guest instead of into Christine's cup; the waitress undoubtedly meant well, but she passed the sand-

wiches across, instead of from the side; goodness, there was plenty to learn, but Miss Allison corrected all the mistakes so quietly, with just a word or two of explanation, and she laughed with them at the temporary confusion, and it was all fun in a way.

Out in the kitchen the most alarming clash and clatter of pans sounded. Christine wanted to laugh. She had read jokes about angry cooks who pounded on the table with the potato masher, or banged the dishes as they washed them.

"I wanted Ramona to come in," said Miss Allison, raising her voice as a particularly alarming crash sounded. "But I'm sorry to say she insists on carrying out her rôle of cook beyond the limits. I'm afraid she will miss most of the good this sort of training does, if she can't enter into the spirit of it more fully."

The little sandwiches were delicious, the hot, weak tea gave them all a delightfully festive feeling, and as for the cookies, the Fresh Air children, so Christine reported later, fairly "wolfed" them down.

Ramona remained persistently in the kitchen,

but when Jane trundled the tea wagon out again, Ramona flatly refused to help "clear away." Every one else was busy, for it was nearly five o'clock. Christine undertook to help Miss Allison close the windows, and make sure the fire in the fireplace was out. Sally was told off to take the youngsters back to the Fresh Air Home and Frances volunteered to go with her. The lady of the house, Dora, was given the task of putting everything back in its place and straightening up the living room.

Finally the little house was locked and Christine, Jane, Ramona, Dora and Miss Allison stood on the steps.

"Remember, at noon to-morrow!" said Miss Allison. "Ramona, you're to come at half-past eleven, so we can prepare luncheon."

Ramona waited till the teacher had turned down a side street, Dora going with her for they lived within a block of each other.

"I'm not going to cook and scrub," announced Ramona. "I'm through; I won't be anybody's servant!"

CHAPTER XIV

RESOURCEFULNESS WINS

"THERE'S no use saying anything to Cousin Lo about it, but Ramona Haddon is plain silly," remarked Christine.

She had come down to Uncle Barry's study to look up a word in his fat, unabridged dictionary. She had found him reading at his desk and the temptation to stay and talk—just for a moment—had been too strong to resist. Uncle Stanley had taken Cousin Lo to the movies, because she wanted to see the historical film showing that night.

"What makes Ramona silly?" questioned Uncle Barry.

Christine considered. She didn't know, she said finally.

"She called me up to-night and said she isn't going to go to school for a week," reported Christine. "That's because she thinks she won't have

to be cook; but Miss Allison will substitute another girl for her and she'll have to be cook when she does go back. You can't finish the term and pass, if you haven't taken the practice house course."

"Doesn't Ramona like to cook?" Uncle Barry asked.

"She doesn't know how," explained Christine. "But that isn't what makes her so cross: she wanted to be the lady of the house. If she could only think straight, she'd see that she will have her turn playing lady. I have to be cook and waitress when my turn comes."

Uncle Barry said mildly that he thought most of Ramona's troubles could be traced to the fact that she was an only child. She usually had her own way at home, he thought.

"I'm an only child," argued Christine.

Then she happened to think that might sound as though she compared herself with Ramona and found herself almost perfect.

"Of course I do a great many things I shouldn't do," she admitted, "but at least I don't fuss over cooking."

"Well," smiled Uncle Barry mischievously, "look at the array of talent brought to bear upon your training; you don't always seem to appreciate our efforts, but if two uncles and a cousin can prevent it, you're not going to grow up a spoiled child and be a nuisance to your friends."

"I don't think there's much danger I'll be spoiled," Christine declared gravely.

She went upstairs to her neglected lessons and, finishing them, set the alarm clock for half-past six. She meant to get up early and practice.

The next day Miss Gurth reported to Miss Allison that Ramona Haddon was absent. Just as Christine had foreseen, another girl, Vera Trainor, was appointed in Ramona's place. When Ramona did not return, Vera continued to be "cook" and in a day or two the routine of the practice house was in full swing.

Each of them really had the full benefit of six lessons a day, for Miss Allison encouraged them all to listen in groups and to keep note books. Social amenities, good English, common sense methods of work, all were woven into the teacher's presentation of the ordinary daily household

tasks and the girls absorbed intangible benefits as well as much definite knowledge of deft and scientific housekeeping. They thoroughly enjoyed the experience and when Saturday came, not one of them would have missed the voluntary attendance for any price.

They found Miss Allison with a baby in her arms—a fat, blue-eyed infant with fuzzy dark hair and a roguish smile.

"This is something like," said Christine, beaming at the baby. "What is his name, Miss Allison?"

"Her name is Rosalie and she's a lamb," announced Miss Allison, smiling.

The morning was given up to the routine of the baby's toilet. None of the girls, except Jane, had ever handled a young baby before and they acted as though they expected Rosalie to fall apart in their hands.

"The arms and legs of my dolls *always* came off," Christine remembered fearfully.

"Well, a baby's arms and legs don't," Miss Allison assured her. "Jane, you hold Rosalie while I show Frances how to test the bath water."

Rosalie loved her bath. She behaved so beautifully that the girls might have kept her paddling in the tub the rest of the day, if Miss Allison had not interfered.

With the baby bathed and dried and powdered and put into the crib upstairs for a nap, there was still plenty to be done. Sally must wash a frock and iron it, for it was the rule that a clean dress be kept in reserve and the baby was always returned to the Home in immaculately clean clothing. The house must have its weekly cleaning, there must be some baking done. And there was luncheon for seven to be prepared.

In the afternoon, they amused Rosalie on the lawn and Christine and Dora, her hostess, played a set of tennis on the courts attached to the grounds. By half-past four it was time to serve tea for a number of the townspeople called, half out of curiosity, half out of friendliness. Miss Allison encouraged this custom, for she thought that the more visitors who came, the more practice in entertaining the girls would have.

Miss Allison had pinned the directions up in the kitchen and as the refreshments were to be

of the lightest description, she had decided that Jane and Vera could be trusted to prepare them without supervision, especially as they had been serving tea for a week and ought to be accustomed to the routine by this time.

So Miss Allison showed the callers through the house and helped explain just what the Board of Education planned and hoped to accomplish. The girls answered questions, took turns amusing Rosalie, and listened to the praises showered upon them complacently.

Christine was standing near the kitchen door, watching a fat woman open the hall closet door and peer in—"I suppose she wants to see if things out of sight will bear inspection," thought Christine amusedly,—when some one twitched her dress.

"For the love of Mike!" whispered Jane inelegantly. "Come out in the kitchen, will you? We're in an awful mess."

Christine backed gently through the door behind her, into the kitchen. Jane and Vera confronted her, their faces tragic.

"Can't you make the sandwiches?" asked Christine anxiously.

"Make 'em!" groaned Jane and Vera in chorus. "There isn't anything to make them of!"

Vera, the cook, had been crying. Great red streaks ran down from her eyes and her nose was very pink indeed.

"All those people expect something to eat and there isn't anything to eat!" choked Vera.

"Well, why isn't there?" Christine demanded practically.

"It's my fault!" said Jane.

"No, it was mine—I ought to have known better," Vera insisted.

Christine tried to be patient.

"Just what did happen?" she suggested with something of Cousin Lo's judicial manner.

"Everything," said Jane comprehensively. "First, there was a starving dog around here and I fed him bread—I thought no one would miss a couple of slices of bread—but the silly creature followed me up the steps and I shut the door in his face."

"That's more than I did to the refrigerator

door,"—Vera took up the tale of woe. "I thought I latched it, but I didn't and that awful dog got into the refrigerator and ate up everything in sight—butter, meat, cottage cheese, the shelled nuts, chopped ham—there isn't a thing left. He dragged out a dish and that broke on the floor and when Jane and I dashed out, the back porch was a mess."

"Well, don't waste time cleaning it up now," advised Christine. "We'll have to get some more food in a hurry. There's nothing to do but borrow from the neighbors."

"We can't!" protested Jane. "We don't know people in this end of town."

"They're neighbors, aren't they?" Christine countered. "Come on, Jane, you and I'll canvass; it won't be any worse than asking for donations for the church supper and I've done that back in Harrington. Vera can be getting the tea wagon ready. If Miss Allison asks where we are, tell her we're saving the day and will be right back."

Most of the houses in the immediate vicinity of the practice house were small homes. They

had little vegetable gardens and a general air of being overcrowded. Though the furnace had been started in her uncles' house for a week or more, the kitchen in these small houses was the only really warm room, since saving coal was an item to be considered.

"We can't eat cabbages," said Jane, eying the few late vegetables still left in the ground, as Christine turned in at the yard of the nearest house.

Christine knocked at the kitchen door and a plump, motherly looking woman answered her rap.

"We're from the practice house and a dog ate up the refreshments, and there's a mob of people there who must be fed," said Christine at a gallop. "If you could lend us something to eat, we'll see that it's returned next week."

The woman laughed and her double chin quivered.

"I haven't much on hand," she declared, "for there's only Mr. Graham and myself in the family; but you're welcome to whatever you can find. Only it's plain food. We're plain people."

Though Mrs. Graham insisted she had little to offer, when she took the girls out into her plain, neat kitchen and began to lift out loaves of home-baked bread, a stone jar filled with cookies, another smaller stone jar of butter, half a cheese—the big, round, yellow "store kind"—and a beautiful brown meat loaf, Christine and Jane felt as though their cooking lessons had hardly started.

"We can't take all this," they protested. "You have your dinner to get to-night; and to-morrow is Sunday—what will you eat then?"

"My lands, that doesn't worry me—I can stir up something," said Mrs. Graham capably. "Let me help you carry this stuff over; if it isn't enough, my sister lives across the street and I know she did her baking to-day same as I did."

Mrs. Graham displayed a tact that was truly amazing. She helped the girls carry the food into the kitchen of the practice house, she suggested sandwich combinations, admired the kitchen equipment, and then withdrew.

"I know you have to do it yourselves to get your points," she said, "so I won't help you. You

can bring the dishes back Monday, if you're in a hurry to go home after this party."

Christine, Jane and Vera worked feverishly and at last the tea wagon was wheeled into the living room. Miss Allison looked a little queer when she saw the change in menu, but she said nothing. As for the guests they were loud in their praises of the delicious sandwiches and the cookies. They said the girls must be receiving excellent training to be able to do so well.

"My conscience hurt me," Vera confessed to Miss Allison later, "but I thought the Board of Education would have a fit, if we told the visitors that a dog had eaten up the refreshments."

CHAPTER XV

MOTHERS ARE NICE

THE incident cemented the foundations of a firm friendship between Mrs. Graham and all the girls who came and went in the practice house. The food was "paid back" quickly, but after that Mrs. Graham often dropped in for an hour in the morning to listen to Miss Allison lecture on clothes, or laundry work, or the proper planning of menus. Mrs. Graham was a famous housekeeper, but she said there was always something more to learn.

Ramona Haddon returned to school the next week but, finding that she was still "cook" and would be until she finished a week in that rôle, she persuaded her doting mother to let her drop out of school and for a year study only music.

"She doesn't have to do a thing she doesn't want to do," said Christine to Jane.

"Well, maybe not, but she doesn't beam with

happiness, does she?" the cheerful Jane answered.

Christine had to admit that Ramona was not a sunshiny person.

"Though I could do with a little spare time myself," Christine confessed. "This never having a free afternoon gets tiresome, after a while."

However, the course in home economics was unexpectedly interrupted the following week by the enforced absence of Miss Allison. She was called back to her home city by the dangerous illness of her mother and until her return the practice house schedule was postponed.

"Come on over to our house," suggested Jane, the first of the unoccupied afternoons. "You can practice after dinner just as well."

It was a raw, gray day and Christine felt lonely. She could go home and play with Winks, or practice her music, but neither plan promised much hilarity. At Jane's house there would be *people*—gay, talkative, interesting people. Uncle Barry read all the time, Uncle Stanley never reached home much before five, and Cousin Lo,

who hated cold weather, sat and made yards of lace as she huddled by the fire.

Christine would have liked to see more of Edith Foster, but Edith had her own friends, of course. Besides, she and Uncle Stanley didn't seem to agree very well, and half the time they actually quarreled.

"All right, I'll come over," decided Christine. "I have to leave my books and tell Cousin Lo, that's all."

Cousin Lo had gone to bed with a headache, Amelia reported, so Christine said she would be home by five or half past, and went down the garden path, Winks watching her wistfully from the kitchen window. He was allowed in the house part of the day now, owing to the change in the weather and both Amelia and Carolina made a great fuss over him. He would sit in the kitchen an hour at a time, while Carolina ironed and she would talk to him as though he were another person. Winks seemed to understand all she said, and wagged his tail to punctuate her remarks.

Jane met Christine at the back door of the

Pine house, her expression a mixture of laughter and despair.

"You never saw such chaos!" she announced. "Mother went into the city to shop to-day and Grandma is a wreck; I suppose three children are a little too much for you, when you're an old lady."

Christine, entering the kitchen, found that Jane had stated the situation conservatively. Grandma Footing, her white hair twisted into a tight knot, instead of the pretty soft mass in which she usually wore it, was tying a bandage around Grace's small fat forefinger.

"A girl bit it," said Grace, seeing Christine looking at her sympathetically.

"That's all right, but what did you do?" Jane asked pointedly.

"I bit her," said Grace serenely.

Grandma Footing clipped the string and dismissed her patient.

"I think every child on the block has been playing in our yard, to-day," she sighed. "I've had to go out seven separate times and stop them fighting. Grace is going to grow up into a

hoodlum, if she is allowed to play with the children in this neighborhood."

Christine had heard this grievance before. The family laughed at it.

"If Grandma only knew it, her favorite grandchild is the worst 'hoodlum' on the block," Jane had told Christine. "For all she looks like something off the cover of a hymn book, Grace is a belligerent youngster; any time there is an argument, ten to one, she started it."

Christine hardly recognized Mrs. Pine's neat kitchen. Every table was strewn with unwashed dishes, dish towels were draped across the chairs. Something was boiling and bubbling on the gas range and every few minutes it boiled over and a stream of water threatened to put out the flame.

"I haven't had a minute to clear away since lunch," apologized Grandma Footing. "I wanted Bobby and Georgie to help me, but they flatly refused. And when Billy came home from school this afternoon he went off to football practice and never went to the store for me!"

"Poor Grandma, your grandchildren are selfish pigs," said Jane sympathetically.

"Can't you go and lie down for an hour and Jane and I will clear up the kitchen?" Christine offered—poor Grandma Footing did look so tired!

"Well, I would like to change my dress," said the old lady gratefully. "I don't think I've washed my face since breakfast. But it isn't only the dishes, you see—you have to watch Grace and if Bobby and Georgie want to go out of the yard, you must tell them their mother said no. She left word they were to stay in the yard after school every day this week, because they didn't come home from school one afternoon. I declare, Jane, I don't see how your mother stands many days like this!"

Grandma Footing got as far as the hall, then came back.

"I have some beets boiling on the stove," she said. "They're pretty large and they take a long time to cook; if they get soft before I come down, turn the water off and leave them in the sink. I want to make beet salad for your father to-night."

Christine and Jane found aprons and set to work.

"I didn't bring you over here to wash dishes," apologized Jane.

"This is more fun than work," Christine assured her. "We don't have to do it—I suppose that's the reason. But I should think your mother would be a wreck with all she has to do."

The shrill call of the telephone made them both jump, and Jane rushed to answer it.

"That was Dad," she said, when she stood once more at the sink. "He was quite put out to find Mother isn't home yet; she knows where all his papers are and he wanted an address from some letter. To hear him talk, you'd think Mother had been away at least a year, instead of half a day."

"She ought to get away oftener," stated Christine, flourishing a clean dish towel. "I read somewhere that women with lots of children ought to save their nerves."

"The only way is to send the children to the Fresh Air Home, then," Jane declared. "Mother hardly ever goes away; she says it isn't fair to

Grandma, at her age, to look after small children."

Christine polished a glass thoughtfully.

"We could look after the children, if she went away some Saturday," she said. "Bobbie and Georgie and Grace; we could take entire charge of them. Wouldn't your mother like to go somewhere on a Saturday?"

"Yes, she would," agreed Jane. "She has a sister who is principal of a grade school out in the country; Mother would love to spend a Saturday with her. I think she'd go, too, if we promised faithfully to look after the children and relieve Grandma. Say, she'd like to take Grandma with her—that would be nice, wouldn't it?"

Christine thought this sounded like a fine plan and then the beets boiled dry and they both rushed to the rescue. While Jane was putting the hissing steaming iron pot into the sink, a loud scream from the yard sent Christine flying out. To her excited gaze, some fifty boys appeared to be in a wriggling heap, while Grace and a little girl some years older, danced around, kicking the

pile and crying, "You let Bobbie alone! You let Bobbie alone!"

Christine saw no signs of Bobbie, but she assumed he must be underneath the other boys. She began picking them off, as one would pick raisins out of a loaf of bread.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" she told them severely.

All that was needed to stop the fight, was the voice of authority. The heap fell apart, to disclose Bobbie and Georgie Pine, much disheveled flat on the ground.

They were pugnacious, attractive freckle-faced lads, seven and eight years old respectively. Gazing upon them Christine had an inspiration.

"You'd better come in and get washed before your mother comes," she suggested. "It will be dinner time soon."

The other children melted away, as children will when "wash up" is mentioned, and the boys and Grace followed Christine into the house.

Mrs. Pine did not come home till an hour later and in that interval Grace and the boys quarreled: the phone rang three times, once a wrong

number; Billy came in from playing football and was angry because some one had taken a book out of his room; Nina came from the office and went to bed with a bad cold. And Mr. Pine came home earlier than usual and went down cellar to shake the furnace when he heard that Mrs. Pine had not come back.

Billy turned on the radio, Bobbie and Georgie wrangled over a game of dominoes and Grandma Footing wasn't pleased because two of the beets had scorched. Christine and Jane, setting the dining-room table, with Grace literally under their feet, glanced at each other significantly.

"She has to stand this every day," said Christine, placing the knives and forks.

"Well, of course she makes the boys behave," admitted Jane. "And she doesn't allow Grace to whine; and if she tells Billy to go to the store, he goes; but just the same, I don't believe she has such a lot of fun, day by day."

But Christine couldn't feel sorry for Mrs. Pine when she finally ran up the front steps. Her arms filled with small parcels—a rose pinned on her shabby coat—her face glowing from the

walk from the station, her lovely smile including Christine in its warmth as well as her own children, Jane's mother looked completely happy.

Strange how the atmosphere of the house changed, the moment she was in it! The children stopped arguing, Mr. Pine came up from the cellar and settled under the best light to read his paper; Grandma Footing brought in the beet salad proudly, Billy wanted his mother to know he was almost sure of a place on the "first" team, Nina called down that her cold was better and she thought she'd come to dinner after all.

Christine, running back to her own house a few moments later—she had resolutely declined all invitations to stay for dinner—wondered if her own mother had been like that.

"For mothers are nicer than any one else," she told herself wistfully, "nicer even than grandmothers."

CHAPTER XVI

ALL FOR EDUCATION

MISS ALLISON did not come back. It was rumored that she might not return till after Christmas. No substitute was appointed, since her work could wait for the second term. Ramona Haddon, who though she wouldn't admit it, was lonely, said she would have stayed in school, if she had known this was the way it was going to be.

Christine, at Cousin Lo's repeated urgings, went to spend one afternoon with Ramona. They made fudge which didn't harden and the two girls disposed of the sticky mess with spoons. As a result, Christine was unable to touch her dinner and Uncle Stanley declared that the next time she spoiled her appetite, she would have to go without dessert for a week.

Uncle Stanley didn't look happy, Christine decided, studying him from the hallway as she went

upstairs. He was thinner and sometimes he sat and talked with Uncle Barry till late at night —Christine coming down once at eleven o'clock to let Winks in, had heard their voices and when she woke a second time, they were still talking; she had glanced at her wrist watch and the luminous dial told her it was half past one. They were standing on the side porch, which explained why she heard their voices, and Christine had a moment of pity for Uncle Barry who must be so weary, before she dropped into delicious slumber again.

"Mother's sister has a birthday next Saturday," declared Jane a few days after she and Christine had discussed Mrs. Pine's lack of recreation.

"I told her if she wanted to go and take Grandma that you and I would look after the children," went on Jane. "At first she wouldn't hear of it, then she began to think that Nina would be away all day, that Billy was going off with his Scout troop and Daddy is away over the week-end. So I think she'll decide to go."

Now it happened that the morning Mrs. Pine

and Grandma Footing left for Greenville—and they had to get up at six o'clock, for there were no bus lines to the small town and only one or two trains a day—that Christine received her allowance. She always felt wealthy for the first few days of the week, but it must be admitted that toward the close she cut down on lunches and was not above taking a sandwich or two with her, if Carolina tactfully suggested it.

Cousin Lo went over to the Haddons to spend the day, a custom that she and Mrs. Haddon had followed for years. They took their sewing or their knitting and went to each other's houses soon after breakfast and stayed till close to dinner time. Once or twice a week, turn and turn about, they did this faithfully, month after month, year after year.

Whether it was because they had risen at the early hour of six, or because breakfast had been a hurried meal, or simply because the house didn't feel right without their mother, it was certain that the three younger Pine children were not in the most amiable of moods. The first thing Christine heard, when she knocked and pushed

open the door, was Grace wailing and Jane scolding Bobbie.

"Billy goes off and never even thanks me for putting up his lunch," announced Jane aggrievedly. "I thought Nina would come home and stay in this afternoon, but she's going to a matinee with some girl. This is the most selfish family I ever saw!"

Christine laughed and held up her purse.

"We can go somewhere," she said gayly. "I have plenty of money—just got my allowance. Oh, Jane!"

Christine's eyes sparkled, her cheeks flushed She had just thought of a wonderful plan!

"Why don't we go into the city, we five?" she suggested.

"Go into the city?" echoed Jane. "What for?"

"I want to see it," Christine urged. "Uncle Stanley is always promising to take me and he never does. Besides, I think Bobbie and Georgie ought to see the statues and things they're always talking about in school."

"They ought to see General Peters' tomb," agreed Jane. "Every one ought to see that; he's

the most famous soldier who ever came from our state."

In the end, Christine convinced Jane that it was almost their duty to take the children into Warner, the city across the river where every one in Saxton went to shop and where half the population of the pretty town were employed in the large offices.

It was more of a task than Christine had bargained for, to get ready. Grace was like an eel, but they finally got her into her best hat and coat; Bobbie, dressed, went down, unknown to any one, to "fix" the furnace and covered himself with soot and ashes.

"You know the man comes three times a day to tend the furnace when Daddy isn't here," scolded Jane, getting out clean clothes for her unabashed brother.

"What made you go down and try to fuss with the fire?"

"I thought the house was a little chilly," said Bobbie meekly, and in spite of their annoyance Christine and Jane shouted with laughter.

Grandma Footing said, "I think the house is

a little chilly," forty times a day, if she said it once. Poor lady, she couldn't stir around very swiftly and she often felt cold when every one else was quite comfortable.

At last Bobbie was sitting in one hall chair, Georgie in another, clean and shining; Grace playing with her doll where they could watch her, and Christine and Jane were free to lock the doors and windows, leaving the cellar door unlatched for the furnace man.

You could go into Warner by bus, trolley or train. Christine whose first trip this was, left the choice to Jane.

"It's easier to get on a trolley with children, than either a bus or train," said that experienced young person.

"In the trolley, the conductor helps lift the kids on; in a bus, there is only the chauffeur and he can't help you; and a train is all right, but getting three children up those high steps, no matter if the conductor *does* help boost them, is no joke."

Christine agreed with her and they walked to the trolley line, two blocks over. They had just

missed a car and must wait fifteen minutes. Grace complained that she was cold and Bobbie had to be forcibly restrained from investigating the contents of a trash basket. Georgie insisted on trying to climb a fire hydrant and only desisted when he fell off and hurt his knee.

"I'll bet we've been here an hour," said Bobbie sadly.

"That's because you don't know how to use your time," Jane informed him austerely. Jane was holding Grace and perhaps was already wishing they hadn't come.

"How shall I use my time?" questioned Bobbie.

"Count something," said Jane. "Count—ants!"

She said afterward she said that because she thought it would take Bobbie a long time to count a hundred ants. So it would, but Jane's natural history was defective; there are no ants to be counted in November.

However, the welcome humming of the wires overhead, announced that the car was coming. Both the boys showed signs of dashing out to

the center of the tracks to welcome it and Christine hastily seized Bobbie, while Jane put down Grace and, keeping hold of her with one hand, clutched Georgie with the other.

The car was easy to get into—that much was in its favor. It was the inter-urban type, low like a boat, with doors that opened in the center. Christine and Jane got the children inside with little trouble, but once in, there was no vacant seat.

"Hang on to me," urged Christine as the car lurched and Grace sat down with a thump.

She was a good baby and never whimpered, but two men immediately rose and yielded their seats—and Bobbie and Georgie dashed for them.

"Here, boys have to stand," Christine directed.

"I want to sit next the window!" Bobbie insisted.

"No, me," Georgie argued.

Jane slid in next to the window and took Grace on her lap and Christine sat down beside her.

"I want a drink of water," said Bobbie.

Christine gazed at him impersonally.

"I begin to see why your mother doesn't take

you on shopping trips," she informed him. "Two more restless children I have never seen."

The conductor coming through for fares just then, created a diversion. Both boys and Grace, too, took an embarrassing interest in the transaction. They almost crawled into the conductor's pockets, Jane said.

"If all the day is going to be like this, we won't last till night," sighed Christine, while Jane for the twentieth time pulled Grace's fat little arm back from its investigation of the hat of the woman in the seat ahead of them.

"Oh, when we get to the stores, they'll see so much, they'll forget to fuss," Jane said hopefully.

The plan was for them to take a bus as soon as they reached the city, and ride to the tomb of the General. This historical site was frequently mentioned in the classrooms of the Saxton schools and Christine and Jane thought that the boys really should became acquainted with the landmarks of their state at an early age.

"Ride on the top?" asked Bobbie, before they were hardly out of the car at the trolley terminal.

"Yes, of course—what does it matter if we freeze to death?" Jane inquired bitterly.

Christine laughed. It was *cold,* but she liked to ride on top of the bus, for all that. Yet by the time she and Jane and the bus conductor had the three children safely on top of the bus, Christine was wondering whether they could ever hope to get down again. It would be easier to tie a rope to each and drop them over the side, than to face the task of guiding them down that steep, winding stairway.

However, Christine reminded herself, there was no use in borrowing trouble. And when the bus moved out of the terminal and into the sunshine, for the first time that morning she began to enjoy herself.

There was some wind, but not too much and the city streets were bright with movement and color. To be sure, Bobbie and Georgie seemed to think that the proper way to view the sights was hanging upside down from the deck railing, but Christine and Jane, by dint of constant admonition, succeeded in keeping them right side up.

"I wish we had something to eat," said Georgie wistfully, midway in their journey.

"You can't eat till noon," Jane announced firmly and just then Bobbie gave such a shout of dismay that the elderly gentleman in the seat behind them, jumped.

"I dropped it!" wailed Bobbie. "I dropped it!"

CHAPTER XVII

STRENUOUS HOURS

CHRISTINE glanced apprehensively behind her as the elderly gentleman pressed the signal button fiercely.

"What did you drop, Bobbie?" she whispered.

"My handkerchief," said Bobbie in a tone of loud grief. "The one my Aunt Etta brought me, with a red ship in one corner."

"You may be interested to know that *I* dropped my glasses," snapped the elderly man, brushing past. "Some one ought to teach children not to yell like wild Indians in public."

Something in Bobbie's hurt, puzzled little face, touched Christine.

"Never mind," she said to him in a low voice. "You didn't mean to make the man drop his glasses. We'll hope he finds them not broken."

The bus went on, before they could see the man pick up his glasses, but for the next three blocks

Bobbie was completely subdued. Then his natural buoyancy prevailed and the urge seized him to sing. Georgie was musical, too, and Grace usually wanted to do whatever her brothers did. The scarlet-faced Jane saw with thankfulness the imposing outlines of the Tomb in the distance.

"We get off the next stop," she told the children. "Now wait till the bus stops and do exactly as Christine says. I'll carry Grace."

In some miraculous fashion, they all got down the stairs without mishap, though the bus driver stared after them, amazement in his eyes.

"Where do that circus be going?" he inquired pessimistically of a stray passenger on the platform. "I'd rather take a pair of zebras out for a walk than look after two kids like that pair."

Fortunately Bobbie and Georgie never heard this uncomplimentary remark. They were prancing down the cement walk, apparently bent on tumbling eventually into the lake at the bottom of the hill.

Christine captured them in time to save them

this fate, and steered them into the path that led to the General's tomb.

The great steel doors were open and a solemn gray light sifted in through the narrow barred windows set high in the gray stone walls. For once the boys were thoroughly silenced and crept close to Christine and Jane. The latter held Grace in her arms till they reached the railing of the rotunda, then put her down.

"What's down there?" some child whispered in awe.

Her voice echoed in the shadowy place.

Christine and Jane peered down, while the boys clung to the railing and looked over. In the open vault below two plain coffins rested, each with a wreath on the lid.

"The General and his wife are buried here," whispered Jane, squinting as she tried to read the bronze tablet on the wall nearest to her.

They walked around the rotunda and looked at the various medals and swords arranged in glass cases, read the three tablets aloud to the uncomprehending children and stepped out again into the pale sunshine.

"Now when you study about General Peters in school, you can tell your teacher you've seen his tomb," Jane instructed Bobbie and Georgie.

"They always ask you dates about when he was born and things like that," said Georgie sadly.

"Well, I read that to you," Christine reminded him. "All you have to do is to remember what I read."

Georgie's confidence in his memory wasn't of the strongest, judging by his expression, but the sight of a lunch stand created a diversion. Both boys discovered they were "starving," and Grace, too, wanted to eat.

"There's no place around here we can take them," said Jane. "Is it—would it be too expensive, Christine, if we went to an automat?"

Christine smiled affectionately.

"I don't know what an automat is," she said, "but I don't think it will be too expensive."

"It's like a cafeteria," Jane explained, "only heaps more fun, really. I've never eaten in one, but I know how they work: you put in the money and the food comes out."

Christine was almost as eager to eat in an automat as Jane was.

"But we ought to see more things, hadn't we?" she suggested vaguely.

"We can walk till we come to an automat," said Jane. "There is one four or five blocks down. There are statues along the avenue, and some historical houses. The walk will be good for us and we'll still be early enough. If you wait till noon you can't get served anywhere in the city, my father says."

Though Christine and Jane tried their conscientious best, it was difficult to interest the boys in the statues of famous men they passed, or in the quaint brownstone houses in which a Governor, a Vice President of the United States and a famous writer, respectively had lived: Bobbie and Georgie glanced indifferently at the spots pointed out to them but it later developed they had been counting the sparrows, and had found the history references a good deal of a nuisance.

"It simply doesn't pay to try to educate children!" wailed Jane when she heard this. "Sparrows! They can see sparrows any time of year

in Saxton. I don't wonder teachers get discouraged."

Grace, of course, was too young to take any genuine interest in sight-seeing and before they had gone two blocks, she displayed a disconcerting determination to sit on the curb and stay there.

"She's t-i-r-e-d," spelled Jane," and I'm afraid she's s-l-e-e-p-y. I forgot all about her n-a-p."

Christine gazed at the obdurate little figure in perplexity.

"She can't stay there," she said helplessly.

In the end they took turns carrying the baby and before they reached the automat Grace was fast asleep.

"You sit down," Christine was beginning, but a pleasant-faced woman came up to them.

"There's a couch over here in one corner," she informed them. "In the rest room—you can leave the baby there; the matron will stay with her."

Jane thankfully accepted the suggestion which left her and Christine free to make the experiment of eating in the automat. The boys had

first to be corraled, having started to follow a man around from slot to slot, completely fascinated by this novel method of serving a meal.

Christine gazed curiously at the rows of square glass cells or boxes; she was reminded of the boxes in a post office and sympathized with Bobbie and Georgie who, left to their own devices, would have tried every kind of food and forgotten to eat any of it.

"I want this! I want that!" they cried in lusty chorus.

"Sh!" admonished Jane, wishing that good manners were also automatic.

After much discussion, they finally chose very much what they would have had at home: soup, spaghetti with tomato sauce, rolls and butter, milk and ice cream for dessert.

"I'd like to eat here all the time," said Georgie blissfully. Christine saw that his round face was dirty—she and Jane had not realized that travel inevitably means grime, especially in connection with small boys—but he looked so good-natured and happy, she could not find it in her heart to criticise him.

And suddenly Christine remembered what her grandmother had done once when a little girl came to visit Christine. Grandma, who loved all children, had come out on the porch and opened her worn leather purse, smiling.

"Here's a quarter apiece for you," she had said, handing the little guest a shining new quarter, and one not quite so shining to Christine.

"You may spend it for anything you like, as long as it isn't candy. You ought to be able to find something nice in the stores uptown."

Harrington was a little town and the stores had been small shops indeed, compared to the large stores in Warner, or even the up-to-date shops in Saxton. But Christine and her small friend had spent a memorable afternoon going in and out of the store, pricing things they thought they might like. Margaret Morse, the little guest, had finally spent her quarter for a string of red beads, but Christine had found a bargain in three bottles of perfume for twenty-five cents and she took these home with her, giving one proudly to Grandma. Christine remembered the enchantment of that afternoon now, as she

looked at the earnest dirty faces opposite her.

"Let's go shopping, Jane," she suggested. "I have a quarter for each of the children. Let's take them somewhere and watch them spend it."

"Five and Ten," agreed Jane laconically. "They're mad about it—there's Grace!"

Grace, somewhat aggrieved, but soon comforted by the sight of bread and milk, joined the party. She had had a good nap and was eager for further adventure.

"We're going shopping," Jane told them, as they left the automat. "Your fairy godmother has a quarter for each of you—be thinking what you want to buy."

Christine had to ask a policeman before they could find a five and ten cent store, but he directed them to one that seemed to cover a whole block. The instant the children found themselves inside this glittering, fascinating palace, they lost their heads.

Grace pulled frantically, intent on leading the party to the dolls.

Bobbie wanted to look at fire engines.

Georgie modestly demanded the airplane department.

"This," said Christine with a flash of intuition, "is going to be worse than we bargained for."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE END OF AN IMPERFECT DAY

"MIDWAY in what Christine later described as "the orgy," the boys caught a glimpse of the refreshment counters. An orange juice drink, the succulent frankfurter, ice-cream sandwiches, all had their appeal. The fact they had eaten their luncheon, as the girls hastily reminded them, made slight impression: Georgie and Bobbie agreed to spend their money on food.

"You won't have anything to show for it," argued Jane, for Christine, having possession of the money felt that she could not be too arbitrary.

"Ice cream," repeated Grace, smiling and smacking her lips.

"Now, Bobbie, you know she'll want just what you have," Jane argued. "And she's already had ice cream once to-day."

"All right," surrendered Bobbie, "I guess I'd rather have a fire engine."

And, after they had looked at everything in the store, from needles and pins to shoe laces—not a single counter would the children skip, though Christine and Jane marveled at what could attract them in a display of curtain rods, nor could they fathom what three youngsters could learn from gazing at a counterful of hair brushes and candles—after this survey, they were ready to decide.

"I like to *see*," said Bobbie with dignity when Christine questioned him.

Bobbie at last decided on a red and black iron fire engine and Georgie was made happy with a wire egg beater—no one could find out what he intended to do with it, but Christine said as long as it was easy to carry, he should have it. The beater cost twenty cents and the salesgirl handed Georgie his change of a nickel. He slipped it into his pocket.

Grace wavered between four dozen clothespins (for some unaccountable reason the housewares' department exercised a strong influence—Chris-

tine ventured the opinion that this might be because the children had seen their mother using the articles and connected them in their minds with the desirable state of "grown up") and a rag doll intended to be used as a pincushion. Tactfully guided, Grace decided in favor of the doll.

It must be confessed that Christine and Jane rather hustled their charges from the store, once the purchases were wrapped; the Saturday afternoon crowd was out in full force and the aisles were jammed. The air was heavy and Christine was in constant fear lest their party be separated, a contingency that also haunted Jane.

Safely out on the sidewalk, they stood for a moment debating the next move.

"We ought to allow a half hour to get down to the Terminal," Christine said thoughtfully.

"We can walk part way," suggested Jane, animated partly by the desire to save Christine from paying out too many fares and partly because she preferred to delay the task of getting on and off the bus.

They had come out by another entrance than

the one they had used when entering the store and Jane's sense of direction, usually excellent, played her a trick. She turned to the left and they had walked several blocks before she discovered they were going in the wrong direction.

Simultaneously with this discovery, Georgie found the nickel in his pocket.

"O-oh! My nickel!" he wailed, to the surprise of the passersby. "I never spent my nickel."

"Well, you can spend it Monday when you go to school," Christine comforted him.

"No, I want to spend it in the store!" shrieked Georgie. "Bobbie spent his quarter in the store and this is some of my quarter I have to spend in the store!"

Jane groaned.

"Mother would take him firmly by the hand and lead him home," she confided to Christine. "Georgie doesn't gain anything with Mother by staging a tantrum; but I just haven't the energy to lead him along the streets, yelling as though I'd smacked him."

Christine shook her head. She didn't have that much firmness, either.

"It would be different if we didn't have the other two," she admitted. "All right, Georgie, stop crying this minute; we'll go back and you can spend your nickel."

As they trudged back over their route, she said to Jane that they would take a trolley or bus from the store, down to the Terminal and in that way lose very little time.

They reckoned without Georgie. Aided by Bobbie and Grace, he was determined to get the biggest nickel's worth he could possibly bargain for. He felt, he tasted, he weighed: pushing through the ranks of the adult shoppers, he blandly established himself at the counters and asked questions till his curiosity satisfied, he decided not to buy.

"We've been here an hour," said Christine. "Honestly we'll have to go, Jane. We ought to be home before six o'clock."

Christine, at this juncture, was beginning to wonder whether it would not have been wiser to have left word with Amelia or Carolina that she and Jane were going to Warner for the day.

"Hurry up!" hissed Jane, rapidly approaching the mental state she described as "a wreck."

"Hurry up, Georgie—we'll have to go without spending that nickel unless you make up your mind now—at once—immediately!"

Georgie gulped, closed his eyes and pointed.

"I'll take that," he announced, bringing his fat forefinger down on—a box of nail polish!

He stuck by his choice and the girl wrapped the brilliant red cake, enclosed in a green tin box, and smilingly gave it to him.

"Now perhaps we can go home," sighed Jane.

Outside they found that half the crowd had made a similar decision. Already it was dusk and every transportation conveyance was packed to the doors. Unthinkable, to get three small children on any of the trolleys or buses lurching past the "Stop" corner.

"Maybe we can get on further down," suggested Jane hopefully. "We can walk a little way and see."

They were all tired and when they had walked three short blocks, to be held up by cross-street traffic, Christine felt an almost incontrollable

impulse to lean up against an electric light pole in a restful attitude.

"Better let me take you where you want to go, lady!" said a hoarse voice beside her.

She turned around. A shabby taxi cab was drawn up at the curb and the driver had spoken. In spite of its hoarseness, his voice was not unpleasant, and he had a wrinkled, friendly face with shrewd kindly blue eyes.

"Take you anywhere cheap as you can ride in this city," he offered persuasively.

"Mercy no!" Jane whispered to Christine. "You can't afford to take all this crowd in a *taxi!*"

Christine looked at the packed cars gliding past them: at the tired children; at the lights flashing about them as the dusk deepened. She hastily ran over the contents of her purse, in her mind.

"We want to go to the Terminal," she said to the taxi driver. "We have to take the Interurban car for Saxton: how much will you charge to take us that far?"

"Fifty cents," he said promptly.

"Get in!" commanded Christine briefly.

She and Jane sank back on the worn leather cushion, Jane taking Grace on her lap. Two small seats let down and held Bobbie and Georgie who were enchanted to be so accommodated.

"I could stay here forever!" said Christine, as the taxi started forward with a jerk that threatened to spill its passengers into the gutter.

Traffic delayed them interminably. They waited at every intersection. Even when the signals were set for them, they stalled, hemmed in by trucks and vans and gleaming handsome town cars. But Christine and Jane "too tired to move" let the taxi cab driver worry about the time, and not even the sight of the Terminal clock, whose long black hands pointed to six, roused in them the desire to hurry.

"I never was so tired in my life," Christine declared, paying the driver and getting the trolley fares ready. "If any one had told me it was such hard work to take three children around, I never would have believed it."

The worst of the trolley rush was over, but the car in which they found themselves was well

filled. Bobbie and George went to sleep during the long ride and had to be awakened when Saxton was reached.

They were cold and hungry, and this did not add to the sweetness of their tempers, though the prospect of a warm house and a hot supper cheered them somewhat as Christine described it.

"I hope Mother hasn't worried about us," said Jane, a little nervously, as they came in sight of the house.

Christine was thinking the same thing—the Pine house had more lights in it than usual, she thought. And, as they turned in at the yard, there was the front door wide open and the bright interior plainly to be seen: standing in the doorway was Uncle Barry and Cousin Lo and behind them, Mrs. Pine and Nina and Billy.

"Where *have* you been?" cried Cousin Lo as soon as she saw the returned travelers.

"We went to Warner," Christine answered. "We took the children sight-seeing."

Cousin Lo stood back as they filed in through the doorway.

"I don't suppose it ever occurred to you," she

said icily, "that Mrs. Pine has been beside herself with anxiety? She came home half an hour ago and the house was dark—no word where any of you had gone."

Christine looked stricken. She had supposed they would be home before Mrs. Pine returned from Greenville.

"I'm sorry," she faltered. "It was all my fault. I suggested we go to Warner. I never do stop to think."

"Billy and Nina could stay home some of the time," Jane suggested rebelliously.

"But they didn't know where you were!" her mother said wearily. "Come and have supper—you all look frozen."

Uncle Barry said nothing at all, but Christine, walking beside him, Cousin Lo stalking on ahead, knew he would have something to say, later. For the twentieth time, she resolved, after this, she would think before she acted.

CHAPTER XIX

CONFIDENCES

UNCLE BARRY'S plan, she learned, was to think, then act. Monday morning he announced quietly that her allowance would be reduced.

"I think you have too much money," he said mildly.

Christine, who had spent her money for the entire week on that unfortunate excursion to Warner, shut her lips rebelliously. She wouldn't argue. Carolina would put up lunches for her, and she must try to get along without spending anything.

But, like many another, Christine had not realized how much she had taken the possession of cash for granted. Little things kept cropping up: a special kind of pencil all the girls started to use on Tuesday; frozen custard for dessert in the school cafeteria Wednesday; a collection

taken up the same day to send one of the teachers on furlough and traveling in Alaska, a Christmas gift.

"I wish I had some money!" she said in a burst of confidence to Ramona Haddon.

She had, at Cousin Lo's request, taken a custard pie over to Mrs. Haddon. Custard pies, owing to the frailness of their construction, were a delicate mission. Christine always breathed a sigh of relief when she delivered one safely. Cousin Lo and Mrs. Haddon exchanged samples of the baking done in their kitchens two or three times a week, though as far as Christine could tell, they cooked about the same kind of food in the same way.

"Want to sell me your pin?" suggested Ramona.

She did not look well—apparently being out of school left her with too much leisure on her hands. Her face was more discontented than ever, and her music no longer interested her.

Christine had few ornaments, but the pin to which Ramona referred, had been her mother's. It was a sapphire, surrounded with pearls. Chris-

tine seldom wore it, for Cousin Lo said it was too old for her. Ramona had coveted it, ever since she had seen it in the small treasure box on Christine's bureau.

"I have four dollars and that's all I have," said Ramona.

Four dollars, in the present state of Christine's finances, seemed a fortune.

"I'll leave the pin on my way to school tomorrow morning," she promised.

The exchange was made the next morning and Christine, four silver dollars jingling in her purse, bought two desserts that noon, just for the sake of luxury, though Carolina had packed her a generous lunch.

That night Edith Foster came to dinner and afterward she and Christine were sitting before the fireplace in the living room for the few minutes Christine could have to herself before starting to study, when Cousin Lo burst into the room.

Cousin Lo usually made a dramatic entrance. Uncle Barry, reading in one corner, scarcely glanced up. Uncle Stanley, sitting at the other

side of the fireplace, rose to place her a chair. Cousin Lo waved him back agitatedly.

"I'd like to know what Christine will do next!" she cried and her tone was not approving.

Christine gazed at her, puzzled.

"Stanley!" Cousin Lo appealed, "Mrs. Haddon just telephoned me and I never was so mortified in my life!"

Edith put her arm around Christine.

"Well," said Uncle Stanley, "don't tell me Christine has wrecked one of your custard pies!"

"She sold her pin!" Cousin Lo declared. "Sold her pin, to Ramona. It looks as though she didn't have enough to eat or wear in our house."

Edith giggled and Uncle Stanley glanced at her rebukingly.

"I don't think Christine looks either ragged or starving," he said critically.

Cousin Lo dropped into one of the big chairs.

"You don't understand," she protested. "Mrs. Haddon says Christine sold her pin for four dollars—her own mother's lovely sapphire and pearl pin that came from Paris and is worth more than when it was bought. I don't think she ought to

be trusted with heirlooms, if she's willing to give them away for a few dollars."

Christine flushed and Uncle Stanley looked annoyed.

"You don't seem to have any sense of values," he said to her. "Isn't your allowance large enough?"

"Uncle Barry cut it in half," Christine explained.

"You forget that doesn't go into effect till next week," said Uncle Barry quietly from under his reading light.

"Well, I spent every cent I had Monday!" Christine returned desperately. "I have to have some money!"

"Why don't you ever take any one into your confidence?" suggested Cousin Lo. "It isn't necessary for you to sell your jewelry like some stage-struck girl. You never say a word to any one, Christine. You're so head-strong!"

Before Christine could speak, Edith answered for her. The flames played over Edith's lovely face, lighted her stormy eyes.

"You don't give Christine any encouragement to come to you!" she cried. "You disapprove of her thoroughly enough when she's made a mistake, but the rest of the time you leave her to herself. If I had a little sister like Christine, she'd come to me and ask for help when she needed it, because she would know how dearly I loved her!"

Edith's voice broke a little as she leaned over and kissed Christine softly on the cheek.

"You tell me things, darling," she whispered. "Disapproval never helps me do my best, either."

There were tears in the eyes she lifted to Uncle Stanley who had come closer as she talked and who now stood looking down at her.

"Doubtless we blunder," he said quietly. "But we love her, too."

Christine noticed that Edith no longer wore the emerald and diamond ring. It seemed to her now that she had not worn it for several weeks.

"Oh, I wish you lived in our house!" said Christine from the depths of her heart.

Later, going upstairs to study—no matter

what happened, lessons never did themselves, she thought distastefully—Christine thought again about Edith's ring. Didn't she *want* to wear it? Had she given it back to Uncle Stanley?

But a few days later the ring gleamed in its accustomed place as Edith drove up to take Christine off for the day. It was Saturday and they were to drive to a town where, so Edith had been informed, a dealer had unearthed some bargains in antique furniture.

Christine, seated blissfully in the car, Winks beside her, wished again that Edith would marry Uncle Stanley and come and live in the big house with them. She knew it was thanks to Edith that her pearl and sapphire pin had been returned without further comment—Cousin Lo must have given the four dollars back to Ramona. Christine had found the pin in her box a morning or two after the discussion in the living room.

The morning was frosty and clear. Edith drove with one window down, and her charming profile above her fur collar was silhouetted against the light.

"I want to get another gate-legged table," said Edith conversationally, skillfully turning out for a big milk truck.

"I suppose I'm silly to accumulate furniture, but I can't let an early American piece go, if I have the money to buy it."

"You can use it in your house," Christine reminded her.

Edith turned moody blue eyes upon her companion.

"That's just it," she answered. "I never expect to have my own house."

Christine stared. Not have her own house? Why—but——

"When you're married?" she hinted. "When you're married to Uncle Stanley, won't you have your own house?"

Edith let the car out and the gray fence rails and bare brown fields began to stream past.

"I don't expect to marry—any one," she said.

Christine was more puzzled than ever, but she wisely kept still.

"If I married your Uncle Stanley I wouldn't

have my own house," Edith announced over her fur collar.

"Why?" ventured Christine.

"Cousin Lo!"—Edith said it explosively, as Christine herself might have spoken.

"Don't you ever breathe a word of this to any one," Edith went on rapidly. "Promise? All right. I *have* to tell some one. Stan doesn't see any reason why, if we're married, we shouldn't go on living in the same house, with Cousin Lo doing the housekeeping and managing everything the way she does now."

Christine blinked.

"Oh, no!" she protested.

"Oh, yes," said Edith. "I said we could have a house to ourselves—this was before you came—and let Cousin Lo keep house for Barry, if he wished it. But Stanley wouldn't hear of it; he has some fanatical notion that Cousin Lo is sensitive and mustn't be slighted. And I just can't see myself living in her house and having nothing to say about the housekeeping."

Christine didn't like this plan, either.

"Perhaps Cousin Lo wouldn't feel slighted if she had Uncle Barry and me," she said bravely. "You and Uncle Stanley could have your own house then, couldn't you?"

"But I want you!" declared Edith, smiling. "All my life I've wanted a little sister. Anyway, Stanley is so stubborn that he won't hear to breaking up the family, as he calls it; his plan is for all of us to live in the big house and he seems to think that nothing but my mean disposition stands in the way of making the plan a success."

Christine shook her head.

"I think it would be dreadful," she said frankly.

"Well, there's nothing to be done about it," Edith replied, glancing at a sign post they passed. "Stanley is like a rock and I'm sure I don't want to hurt Cousin Lo's feelings, either. It can't be very pleasant to be absolutely dependent upon some one else for your food and shelter. Cousin Lo has always been sweet to me and I wouldn't let her know how I feel about living with her, for the world."

She drove the car up beside a wide graveled walk and Christine saw an old spinning wheel set out on a patch of lawn. A sign lettered "Antiques for Sale" told her they had reached their destination.

CHAPTER XX

A LUCKY FIND

THE antique shop was something of a surprise to Christine. The front lawn was very neat, the tiny shed-like porch swept clean and bare. But Edith led the way around a path bordered with white clam shells, to the back door and there, covering a large square plot of ground, was a kind of arbor that, in summer, must have been covered with vines. Now, of course, it was bare, except for some dried, black shreds of branches, and underneath was grouped a collection of odds and ends of furniture. Not the "best" pieces, Edith said carelessly; this furniture was "second hand," and the shop owner did a thriving trade in old golden oak bureaus and rickety tables and chairs, as well as in the beautiful mahogany and birch and walnut designs he filled his house with.

Christine followed Edith into the small house,

to find it literally stuffed from cellar to garret, with valuable and exquisite pieces of furniture, as well as glass, old books, brass and pewter, apparently put down wherever there was space, with little regard for classification or sorting.

"Nice mess, isn't it?" said Edith cheerfully.

The proprietor, a shabby, bent old man with bright eyes under bushy white eyebrows, waved a hand at them hospitably, but did not rise to meet them. He was on his knees before a curly birch chest, carefully polishing the bright wood.

"Good morning, Mr. Holmes," said Edith briskly. "I suppose it's all right if we look around? I wanted to see the tables you expected in this week."

Mr. Holmes pushed up his glasses, gazed at his visitors, put his glasses down and went on with his rubbing.

"They're around somewhere," he said in a squeaky voice. "I remember they came in. Look around as much as you want: be careful, if you go upstairs, because one of the steps is broken."

Edith knew her way about the rooms, having often been in them before. As she moved slowly

around the various chests of drawers and the claw-footed chairs, Christine spied a table of books over by a window.

She went over to look at them. Most of them were ordinary enough, many of them old school books. Christine turned the spotted and stained covers of arithmetics and geographies, noticing the names written on the margins in pencil. She wondered idly who the owners might have been —some of the boys and girls who had studied these books must be men and women now, she reflected, glancing at the dates.

Edith was rummaging through an old desk, apparently forgetting her search for a table. Two more ladies had come in and were examining the glass bottles huddled on a marble-topped bureau. Christine went on turning the books over.

Suddenly she picked up a little fat red volume. She looked at the pages carelessly, then turned to the frontispiece.

"Why!"—she looked over her shoulder, but Edith was across the room.

Christine's heart beat a little faster. She ex-

amined the book minutely—it *was* the same, it was identically the same as Uncle Barry's precious first edition, and the wonderful words in tiny print at the foot of the page said "Volume II."

Christine put the book back, far down under a pile of First Readers. Then she circled a drop-leaf table, skirted a stack of mirrors that threatened to topple on her at any moment, and reached Edith who was still hunting about among the furniture.

"Edith, I've found a book that Uncle Barry will be crazy to own," said Christine excitedly. "He has one, and this is the second volume. It's a first edition, Edith. Remember he told us about it?"

"How do you know?" Edith asked promptly.

"It has all the marks Uncle Barry showed us," urged Christine. "I remember them—do you suppose it is very expensive?"

"Mr. Holmes doesn't care anything about books," answered Edith. "I've often heard him say that he never buys them, unless he is buying the contents of a room and books happen to be

part of the contents. No, I don't believe he will ask much for any book in the store."

She looked over to where the shop proprietor still rubbed energetically with his rag.

"I'll ask him now," said Edith.

Christine, her cheeks on fire, listened to the conversation eagerly.

"Book?" said Mr. Holmes thoughtfully. "Oh, I never charge high prices for books. Once a fellow bought a book from me for twenty-five cents and they say he sold it for thirty dollars, but I can't be bothered keeping track of such things. If the book you want's in fair shape, clean pages and like that, pay me a dollar; I don't care if it's worth more than that to you. I haven't time to go racketing around the country bargaining about books."

Christine had been so interested in the discovery, that she had utterly forgotten the fact that she had no money: that is, she had no money to spend recklessly. If she bought the book she would have to go another week without cash, because her reduced allowance, received that morning, had been automatically still further reduced

by her payment of class dues. One dollar paid for the book would mean that she had only a quarter to carry her through the remainder of the week.

"But Uncle Barry will love having the book, and he'll be so pleased to hear I found it," she thought. "Yes, I'll have to buy it and perhaps Carolina will put me up lunches all next week."

"Want me to lend you anything?" asked Edith carelessly, as though borrowing money was quite the customary thing between friends.

"Oh, no, I have plenty," Christine insisted. "I got my allowance this morning."

She hurried Edith over to the table, half afraid lest some one else had found the buried book, though there was no one else in the shop except the two ladies looking over the glass.

"It's exactly like Uncle Barry's book," said Christine earnestly, burrowing down among the shabby volumes like an eager young rabbit. "Look, it's exactly the same."

Edith obediently looked, but shook her head in despair.

"I can't tell," she confessed. "It looks just

like any other book to me. Are you sure it is like the one Barry has?"

Christine was sure. She clung to the book, afraid to let it out of her hands. It seemed to her that every one in the world must want this treasure as much as she did.

"Is—is a dollar enough?" she asked Mr. Holmes honestly. "I think it is a valuable book."

"Not valuable to me," he said shortly. "Take it, if you want it; I should say an arithmetic would do you more good. I have some good arithmetic books I can let you have for ten cents apiece."

Christine couldn't be interested in arithmetics. She paid Mr. Holmes his dollar and ran out to put the book safely in the car.

"That's lovely," she said happily, returning to the shop.

One of the middle-aged women who had been examining the glass, looked at her curiously.

"You didn't find a rare bottle, did you?" she asked. "My sister and I collect rare bottles and glass."

"Mine was a book!" Christine bubbled. "A

book some one I know wants very much. And it cost only a dollar!"

"Well, it's nice to find something you want for such a little money," said the woman, moving away. "I hope we can be as fortunate."

Edith wanted to go upstairs—apparently she knew all the rooms in the crowded, quaint house.

"Mind the broken step," she warned Christine as they started the steep climb.

Halfway up there was a cobwebby oval window and Christine peeped out of it curiously in time to see the two middle-aged women walking toward the side yard where Edith had parked her car. There was a rusty-looking, old-fashioned car directly behind the Foster car. It evidently belonged to the two sisters.

Christine went on and presently stepped, after Edith, into a square hall with three rooms opening on it. A perfect hodge-podge of furniture filled these rooms, too. There was no heat and the air felt chill and clammy.

"At last!" cried Edith, pouncing on a small gate-legged table. "This is the right size and it's a beauty. Christine, will you see if you can tear

Mr. Holmes away from his rubbing long enough to come up here and give me a price on this table?"

Christine obediently went down the stairs. Three new customers had come into the shop, but Mr. Holmes was still working busily at his curly birch piece.

"Miss Foster wants to know how much a gate-legged table is?" repeated the old man, when Christine put the question to him. "I wish—I don't suppose she could bring it down here?"

Christine gazed at him in astonishment.

"Of course she couldn't!" she said with some indignation.

"No, she probably couldn't," Mr. Holmes agreed. "Well, I haven't much time, but I suppose I can go up and look at it; sometimes I think I'll get a boy in to help me, but that always is a trouble. You have to watch people every minute when they're working for you."

He rose from his knees with a slight groan and complained that his joints creaked.

It took him so long to climb the stairs that

Christine wished she had offered to help Edith bring the table down.

"Only I think the least he can do is to pay a little attention to his customers," thought Christine. "You ought not to have a shop, if you don't want to sell anything."

Mr. Holmes went only as far as the top of the stairs, just far enough so that he could see into the room where Edith stood admiring the table.

"That the table you want?" he asked doubtfully. "It needs waxing; I could wax it for you and put it in shape and let you have it for thirty-five dollars."

Christine gasped; if he had said thirty-five hundred dollars, she would not have been much more surprised. All that money for a table! But Edith merely nodded her head.

"I'll take it," she said briefly.

Mr. Holmes sighed. It meant that he would have to give her a receipt, he explained, and he couldn't wax the table that week. Perhaps she would come in again and they could complete the transaction.

"I'll pay for it now," said Edith firmly. "You

don't have to wax it until you have more time; but please take the money and give me a receipt, for once you mixed up your accounts and sold a table you promised to reserve for me."

Mr. Holmes groaned, scratched his head and went slowly down the stairs, Christine and Edith following him. He led them to a flat-topped desk in one corner of the room, a desk so covered with papers and wrapping paper and string and pieces of tapestry from upholstery work that the single bottle of ink was almost buried from sight. It took Mr. Holmes fully five minutes to write the receipt, and then he stuffed the money carelessly into his pocket and went back to his rubbing.

Edith and Christine walked out to the car and the latter opened the door as Edith put on her gloves.

"My book!" cried Christine. "Oh, my book—it's gone!"

Edith looked at her in alarm.

"The book I bought for Uncle Barry!" Christine explained. "I know who took it!"

CHAPTER XXI

LOST TREASURE

EDITH began to feel around on the floor of the car.

"You must have put it under the seat, Christine," she declared anxiously. "Are you sure you didn't shove it somewhere out of sight?"

Christine was lifting the seat cushions, feverishly searching in every conceivable spot.

"I know I put it right here," she said, pointing to the floor of the car. "I just opened the door and put it in. That awful woman who likes bottles took it—I know she did."

"Who likes bottles?" demanded Edith, bewildered.

"Those two women who were in the shop, looking at glass," said Christine hurriedly. "You saw them—the thin one asked me whether I had found a bottle—she said she and her sister collected them."

"Oh, yes, I remember," Edith nodded. "But she wouldn't open the car door and take your book, Christine. That would be stealing. You mustn't say people steal, unless you have absolute proof."

Christine swooped upon something fluttering on the running board.

"Look!"—triumphantly she held out a dollar bill.

"I *told* her the book cost a dollar!" cried Christine. "She took my book and left this to pay for it. How did she dare! I'm going to make her give it back to me!"

Edith admitted that the woman must have taken the book.

"It's my fault, because I left the car unlocked," she said contritely. "I'm so sorry—but you don't know the woman's name and you can't get the book back unless you know positively she took it, dear."

Christine was furious. She dashed back into the shop and approached Mr. Holmes who looked at her with mild reproach. He moved the can

of polish out of her way as a mild warning not to come any further.

"Mr. Holmes, who was the gray-haired woman who said she liked bottles?" asked Christine, heedless of the other customers in the shop.

"Like bottles?"—Mr. Holmes considered this question, then shook his head.

"She and her sister stood at that table over there, the one with all the glass things on it," explained Christine.

"Oh—why, her name's Mint," said Mr. Holmes. "Miss Mattie Mint. Her sister's named Cora—Cora Mint. Yes, they like glass, but they don't want to pay anything for it."

Christine forebore to say that they evidently didn't want to pay much for anything. She was sure now that the Mints—what a silly name!—intended to sell her precious first edition book and with the money so obtained, buy themselves plenty of glassware.

"Tell me where they live?" she asked. "I—I want to ask them about something."

Mr. Holmes picked up his rag and went to polishing again.

"I don't know rightly where they live, but it's a matter of ten miles in some direction," he said comfortably. "I know it's ten miles, because, whenever they want to force me into a sharp bargain, one or the other of them says, 'Remember we drove ten miles to get this.' "

Christine murmured "thank you," and went out to Edith who had been examining the state of her gas tank.

"Their names are Mint," said Christine, speaking at a gallop. "Mattie Mint and Cora Mint; they live ten miles from here, but Mr. Holmes doesn't know exactly where."

"Well, Christine, we just can't hunt for them," Edith expostulated. "Even if we could find them, which we can't, for I must be in Saxton by one o'clock, we couldn't drive up to their house and say, 'Give me that book.' We'll have to wait till we learn where they live and then perhaps I can write them a tactful letter."

Christine climbed into the car disconsolately. She wasn't going to let the incident spoil her trip, and she knew that Edith had an appointment to go into the city with Uncle Stanley—when they

went in to Warner matinée afternoons, they took the 1.15 train which gave them plenty of time to reach the theatrical district in time for the afternoon performance.

"Well, I don't suppose I'll ever find another one," she sighed.

Edith drove back to Saxton at a good pace—she was a careful driver, and kept her eyes and mind on the road. Also she was pleased about her table and was planning where she would put it when, nicely waxed and polished, Mr. Holmes should send her word it was ready. She was sorry about the book, but she wasn't as sure as Christine was that it had been a first edition.

Christine's thoughts were centered around the book and also on what Edith had told her about Uncle Stanley's insistence that Cousin Lo must live with them after they were married. Christine didn't think that if she were in Edith's place, she would like that arrangement. Cousin Lo was an excellent housekeeper, but she couldn't forget her housekeeping for one moment. She couldn't be happy if she thought a single room in the house was the least bit untidy; she sometimes had

an air of waiting in the background, ready to pounce on a scrap of paper that might flutter to the floor, lingering to put back books that had been taken from the shelves, watching to see that not a corner of a rug turned over, not one shade was higher than another at any of the windows.

"Edith couldn't do anything, if she lived with her," admitted Christine to herself. "Cousin Lo wants every one to think about the house and help keep it nice—you can't have a good time for thinking about putting things away as soon as you've finished with them."

Yet, Uncle Stanley was only trying to be fair. Cousin Lo couldn't be expected to take care of herself, after all these years of living in a comfortable home. She wasn't a young woman, she had no money; it couldn't be pleasant to have to think of what might happen if she suddenly found herself without money and without a home.

All the way back to the house Christine mulled this over in her mind. She wanted to think of a plan that would leave every one pleased, but there didn't seem to be any such plan. Even when Edith dropped her at the door of the house,

declining Cousin Lo's hospitable invitation to stay for lunch with the excuse that she must change her dress before she went to the train, Christine kept thinking about Edith's affairs and Uncle Stanley's.

"I'm going out this afternoon," announced Cousin Lo at the luncheon table. "I hope you'll stay quietly at home, Christine; you might practice your music, or do a little mending. I think you're old enough to take better care of your clothes."

"Yes'm," said Christine, too busy with her own thoughts to resent this advice.

Uncle Barry was not at the table. Amelia reported he was lying down because his head "ached him." Uncle Stanley had telephoned he would stay in town for lunch: that meant Edith was going in to meet him.

"It wouldn't hurt to look in the telephone directory," said Christine to herself, as she watched Cousin Lo's straight back disappearing down the street.

Thinking of Uncle Barry and his headache had brought the disappointment of the book

vividly to her mind again. Christine hated to give up easily. She thought now that if she could find the telephone number of the Mint sisters in the telephone book, she might call them up and ask them—tactfully, as Edith intended to write —what they had done with the book.

But the Mints had no telephone.

Christine looked under half a dozen towns and under the names in the general suburban directory. There was nothing like Mint anywhere among them.

"They have to live somewhere," she assured herself.

She was so obsessed by the idea that they would sell her precious book and buy what was to them their precious glass, that she could hardly sit still.

"There must be a directory," she thought impatiently, recalling that the names and addresses of people in cities and towns were so recorded. "I'll go uptown and ask in the drug store."

Amelia and Carolina were ironing in the kitchen.

"I'm taking Winks for a walk, uptown," said

Christine, putting her bright head in at the kitchen door.

Winks was delighted to go for a walk. He danced and barked and capered and, joy of joys, chased a stray cat half a block, till they came to the drug store and he had to control his emotions and walk sedately beside Christine as she went into the glittering marble- and mirror-lined place.

"A directory?" said the clerk politely. "Over by the telephone stand, Miss."

A neat row of slender volumes, bound in bright orange, confronted Christine. Saxton—no use of looking in there—if they lived in Saxton, Edith Foster would have known them.

Billings, Fancher, Tarryville—some impulse moved Christine to take down the last named.

"Marsh, Meadows, Miller — MINT!" — the name seemed to leap out at her from the printed page.

"Mattie Mint, 612 Main Street"—Christine felt as elated as though she already stood on the doorstep of No. 612 Main Street.

She closed the book. Where on earth *was*

Tarryville? Also, what should she do if the fare was more than twenty-five cents? She would have to go home to get that quarter—she would have to go home anyway, to take Winks. He couldn't go with her.

Back to the house went Christine, running most of the way, a gait which suited Winks exactly. He was surprised and not at all pleased to be thrust unceremoniously into the side door, while Christine went around to the front door and sped up the stairs after her money which she had left in her top bureau drawer.

Christine thought swiftly. She must find out where Tarryville was, she must, in some way, get there, and she must make the Mint sisters give up that book. She snatched the hateful dollar bill from the box into which she had stuffed it, and took a clean handkerchief. In some mysterious manner, a clean handkerchief always made her feel dressed and ready for traveling.

Hurrying downstairs, she raced up the street, toward the drug store again. Before she reached it, she met Keturah Winters, one of the girls in her class at school.

"Oh, Keturah, where is Tarryville?" asked Christine anxiously.

"Tarryville? Let's see—it's a little place," said Keturah who had lived in Saxton all her life and thought it superior to all other small towns.

"It's near Allen Center," said Keturah. "You can go by bus—ten cents each way. Take the bus marked 'Allen Center'—it passes on Bennett Avenue—you know that's the new street, the last street over that way."

Keturah pointed down the intersecting street and stood staring after Christine who, with a mumbled word of thanks, was hurrying over toward Bennett Avenue.

"I would have gone with her, if she'd asked me," thought Keturah a little resentfully.

Had she known that Christine had only a quarter to spend and that the money must pay for the round trip, Keturah might not have been so surprised at her friend's behavior.

"I wish I'd asked Keturah how long it takes," Christine was thinking as she came to Bennett Avenue.

Luck was with her, for just as she reached the corner, a great green and yellow bus came whirling toward her in a cloud of dust. She could just make out the sign "Allen Center," across the front.

CHAPTER XXII

SOME PEOPLE ARE PERSISTENT

THE bus stopped at Christine's signal.

"Pay as you enter," the driver instructed her hoarsely, as she climbed the two high steps.

Christine handed him her quarter, received the change and dropped a dime into the box. A bell rang, the bus started forward.

She made her way to a vacant seat and looked about her with interest. The bus was well filled, but there was no one Christine knew. Tarryville and Allen Center were not on the direct road to the state capital, as Saxton was.

Christine watched the passengers, the road, the scenery and the small towns through which they passed, with equal interest until she realized with a start that she was the only passenger left in the bus. The others had dropped out so gradually that she had not noticed, till, happening to

glance behind her, she saw nothing but empty seats.

"Where do you want to go to, lady?" asked the driver, chewing gum with a steadiness that was rather fascinating.

"Tarryville," Christine answered meekly.

Her watch showed her that she had been riding three quarters of an hour.

"You get off at Allen Center," the driver directed her. "Then you can walk or take another bus—it isn't far."

Not for the world would Christine have asked, "How much does it cost?"—instead, she nodded and when he looked around gain and said, "Allen Center," she stood up.

As she descended from the bus, she tried not to stare around. She thought this couldn't be all of Allen Center, yet she was at a loss to discover where the rest of the town might be. A shed that read "Bus Station," and two buses standing before it; a sandwich and frankfurter stand; and a wire and glass tower marked with a sign that said it was the property of the electric light com-

pany and that tresspassers were warned to keep out at their peril, were all that she could see.

"Hey, there's the bus for Tarryville!" the driver of Christine's bus called after her.

One of the yellow buses standing at the shed-like station showed signs of moving. Christine ran over to it, anxious not to be left alone in this forsaken place. As she climbed in and met the gaze of the three or four passengers already seated, she heard with sinking sensation the driver's "Fare please—put ten cents in the box."

Christine didn't have the courage to step off. Not with people looking at her and the driver pointing expectantly to the coin box. She put in a dime.

"Maybe Miss Mint will lend me a dime," she comforted herself. "No, two dimes. Wasn't I silly not to walk! I wonder how far it can be—Keturah said it was near Allen Center."

Keturah proved to be rather inaccurate. It took another half hour before the bus rolled into a pleasant village and stopped at a white-washed building evidently the post office.

"Please where is Main Street?" Christine

asked the driver as three of the four passengers descended.

"Here," he answered her. "You're on it."

Christine hastily followed the others to the pavement and the bus rolled on.

She glanced at the houses across the street. The one painted red had its number neatly painted on the steps—189.

"I should have stayed on the bus," thought Christine wearily.

She began to walk. Tarryville was a pretty town and seemed to be a thriving community. Only the houses had large grounds and the numbers didn't make allowances for the lots. By the time Christine came to 612, she felt as though she had walked a mile at least, and the things she had planned to say to the sisters refused to stay in her mind.

"Suppose they aren't home," she worried. "Suppose they are home—suppose they won't give back the book? Well, they just have to give it back—that's all there is to it."

She looked at the house—612 was smaller than its neighbors, but an exceedingly neat brown

frame house. It looked a bit prim, like the Mint sisters, decided Christine. She went up the path and lifted the brass knocker on the front door, not daring to delay lest her courage should desert her.

She had no way of telling the sisters apart—that is, which was Miss Mattie Mint and which Miss Cora; but the woman who answered her knock was one of the sisters. Christine knew her, even without her hat and in her rustling black silk dress. It was not the sister who had spoken to her in the shop and told her she collected glassware.

"How do you do—is your sister at home?" Christine asked, hoping her voice sounded confident.

"Mattie?" said the Miss Mint before her. "Why, yes, she's home; but we are entertaining the sewing circle this afternoon."

"I would like to see her, just for a minute," Christine explained.

"Come in," said this Miss Mint—Cora, she must be Christine thought as she stepped into a narrow hall.

"Sit here," said the sister and pointed to a chair.

Christine sat down, hearing the shrill, buzzing tones of the sewing circle in a near-by room.

"Did you wish to see me?" asked Miss Mattie Mint, rustling out.

She knew—Christine knew she was aware why she had come, as soon as she saw her. A dull red crept up into her face. Christine was surprised to find she was sorry for her.

"I come to get my book back," she said gently.

"Your book?"—Miss Mattie Mint spoke haughtily.

"Yes, the book you took out of the car," declared Christine firmly. "It's mine. I have to have it."

"I take nothing without paying for it," Miss Mint answered, keeping her voice low. "I paid you for that book; it's mine now."

Christine tried to keep her temper.

"I bought it first!" she maintained. "I didn't want to sell it to any one; I've brought your dollar back."

Miss Mint waved away the green dollar bill Christine pulled from her coat pocket.

"You can't have the book. It's mine. I paid for it," she said obstinately.

Christine sat down again.

"I'm not going till I get it," she announced.

Miss Mint gazed at her in open exasperation. She didn't want the sewing circle to overhear the argument, neither did she want any one to inquire why this strange girl was sitting in her hall.

"I'll mail the book to you," she said. "I haven't time to get it for you now; I have guests."

Christine naturally didn't put much faith in this suggestion; if Miss Mint wanted the book badly enough to take it out of the car, she would be likely to want it too much to bring herself to part with it voluntarily.

"No, I have to have it now," Christine informed her.

Miss Mint turned on her heel and disappeared. Christine waited perhaps fifteen minutes. Then the other sister—Miss Cora—came out to her, looking rather agitated.

"If you'll go home like a good girl, I'll see

that my sister sends you the book, dearie," she whispered. "Mattie should not have taken it; I didn't know what she had done, until she told me at the luncheon table. She thought because she paid you as much as you had paid for the book, you'd be satisfied. But I'll see that she sends it to you the first thing in the morning."

Christine shook her head.

"To-morrow is Sunday," she reminded Miss Cora. "No, I have to take the book with me. I'll wait, if you don't mind."

Miss Cora did mind. That was obvious. But she didn't know what to do with this determined young person who persisted in sitting in her front hall and gave every indication of being able to sit there until she secured her own way.

Miss Cora went back to the sewing circle. Still Christine waited. She was very tired and she hadn't the slightest idea how she was to get home; but she did know that if she had to sit in this hall all night, she wouldn't leave without the book that was rightfully hers.

Presently the sewing circle had refreshments. Christine heard the clatter of plates, the tinkle of

silver. Miss Cora came out and begged her again to let them mail her the book.

"Why can't I take it now?" asked Christine wearily.

"My sister says she hasn't time to get it for you," Miss Cora announced nervously.

She acted as though she realized this wasn't much of a reason.

Christine said again that she would wait and Miss Cora returned to the sewing circle. A sensation of needles stabbing her left foot roused Christine to action. She couldn't sit there any longer; her foot had gone to sleep.

She stood up and walked the length of the hall. The rug muffled the sound of her footsteps—she came to a stop opposite a doorway.

"Well— it *is!*" she almost said aloud.

There on a table in this room—evidently a small library,—lay her red book. A paper pamphlet lay beside it. Christine boldly walked in and looked at the title—it was a catalogue of rare old books!

"I have as much right to take my book as she had!" she told herself determinedly.

But she didn't feel as comfortable as she would like to, and she stood a moment, the book under her arm, debating what to do.

If she went in and announced she had taken the book, she might embarrass the sewing circle; why not leave a note?

"Dear Miss Mint," she wrote, finding a paper and pencil close beside the catalogue, "I have taken my book, and am leaving you the dollar. I'm sorry, but I have to have the book for my uncle who has the first volume."

She folded the paper, stuck it between the leaves of the catalogue and hurried through the hall to the front door. She breathed a deep sigh of relief when she closed the door behind her and went down the steps. She had Uncle Barry's book, even if she had only a nickel with which to get back to Saxton.

CHAPTER XXIII

A REAL PREDICAMENT

CHRISTINE had waited so long in the Mint house that it was nearly dark. Also she had had no opportunity to ask them to loan her bus fare. She thought ruefully that she would not have asked them for a penny if she had been starving—not that a penny would go very far if she had been starving——

"Stop being a goose," she scolded herself. "You are thinking these idiotic thoughts simply because you don't want to face the job of getting yourself home; now think about it until you decide what to do."

The precious book tightly under her arm, she trudged along the dim street—evidently Tarryville was economical with its electricity—and seriously considered her problem.

Here she was, miles from Saxton. No one knew where she was. She had just one nickel,

knew no one in this strange town, couldn't possibly walk the distance. What was the answer?

"Telephone!" said a voice within her.

Well, a nickel was probably enough for that. But should she telephone Uncle Barry? He couldn't come after her. Cousin Lo would be furious and not pleasant to listen to. Uncle Stanley might or might not be home; he would also be displeased.

"I'll phone Edith!" Christine decided.

She wasn't sure Edith would be home, but some one would be there to take the message. As soon as Edith came in, she would come after Christine in her car. Of course there was the possibility that she and Uncle Stanley might stay in town for the evening—they sometimes did, following a matinée, and came out on the "theater train" late.

"Well, I'd better chance it," thought Christine, looking around for a pay station.

She finally had to ask—stopping a good citizen who was hurrying home to supper.

"Telephone—right over there in Jingle's," he said, with a wave of his hand over his shoulder.

Christine saw a grocery store with a porch built across it. She mounted four steps and entered a long low room, crowded with general merchandise and with brooms, mops, hams, pieces of harness, etc., dangling from the ceiling.

At first Christine thought the place was deserted, but in a few moments a clerk bobbed up from behind a counter and asked her what she wanted.

"Have you a telephone booth?" asked Christine anxiously.

"In back," he said, pointing to the rear of the store.

Christine walked back, between crowded counters and found a single booth, tucked away behind a stack of what appeared to be rolled mattresses. Evidently this store sold everything!

She stepped into the booth and closed the door. No light—but she didn't need a light. She had Edith's number on the tip of her tongue. She put her nickel in the slot, gave the number and waited.

"Line's busy," said Central, after a long wait.

The nickel clattered back into the metal cup.

Christine sat on the tiny three-cornered seat and counted one hundred. Then she tried again.

"Sorry, that's the busy signal!"

Back came the money. This time Christine dropped it on the floor and had to feel around in the dark till she found it. She shivered to think what might have happened, had there been a crack in the floor.

Just to be "safe," she counted another hundred, then gave Edith's number again.

"Hello, hello!" said a faint, faint voice in her ear.

A miserable connection! Christine shouted.

"Is Edith there? May I speak to Edith Foster?"

She couldn't hear the answer at all. She didn't think it was Edith speaking, but it might be.

"Can you hear me?" she asked imploringly.

A faintly whispered "Yes—perfectly," was reassuring.

"Ask Edith Foster to come and get me," instructed Christine. "I'm in Tarryville. Tarryville—ask her to come with the car. I'll wait for

here in—in—" she floundered a moment, then remembered the name of the store.

"I'll wait for her in Jingle's store," shouted Christine, hoping with all her might that the person at the other end of the wire was hearing her.

A buzzing and chattering sounded in her ear. What on earth was the speaker trying to say! Then a noise as if something exploded in the receiver and a horrible gritting and grinding that put Christine's teeth on edge.

"It's no use—I can't hear you," she cried in despair. "Be sure and tell Edith, won't you?"

No reply—at least none that she could hear.

Christine hung up the receiver.

"I wonder how long they keep open and if they'll let me wait here," she reflected, stepping out of the booth.

The store was dark. For a moment, she didn't realize what was the matter, then she saw that the counters were covered with strips of cloth. The store was closed for the night!

Here was a nice predicament! To be locked in a store, in a town where no one knew her. She didn't have any real assurance that her message

would reach Edith, either, and if it didn't, no one at home would know what had become of her.

"It's Saturday night, too," thought poor Christine. "No one will come—I'll have to stay here over Sunday. Wouldn't you think a store would keep open Saturday night?"

The more she thought of that, the more it irritated her. What kind of a town could this Tarryville be, where even the stores closed early Saturday night?

"I'm glad I don't live here," said Christine and the sound of her voice startled her.

She felt her way between the counters and in a few moments her eyes grew more accustomed to the darkness. She could tell where the front windows were, because a ray of light from a street lamp fell across the corner of one.

"Oh!" Christine jumped, as something landed with a thud on the floor beside her.

Then a soft purring sounded and something furry rubbed against her. The store cat was evidently glad to have company.

Christine leaned down and patted kitty. It

wasn't so lonesome, with *something* alive to talk to!

The cat followed her (getting mixed up with her feet but only grunting a little when Christine inadvertently kicked her), all the way to the front of the store. Christine tried the door hopefully, but it was locked.

"If I had another nickel, I could phone Central and ask her to get some one to come and let me out," said Christine to the cat.

Then she thought perhaps she could attract "Central" without putting money in the slot, and she felt her way back to the phone; but ten minutes "jiggling" produced no results.

"I'd better stay near the windows," said Christine, talking again to the cat who rubbed against her, "because if Edith comes after me and finds the store closed, she'll think I didn't wait."

How Edith was to get her out of the store, once she found her, didn't greatly worry Christine. Edith would think of some plan.

Sitting on the edge of the flooring of the larger window, Christine stared disconsolately into the deserted street. Not a person passed. She was

hungry—why of course she was hungry! She had had no dinner. It must be way past dinner time.

Uncle Barry would be glad to see the book, though—it was worth all the trouble it was costing her—and suddenly Christine realized that she didn't have the book. Panic seized her—what had she done with it?

"Left it in the phone booth," she told herself.

She felt her way back to the phone booth again, but though she felt on the seat, on the shelf where the phone was screwed and all around the floor, getting down on her hands and knees and running a splinter in her thumb that made her want to cry, she couldn't find the book.

She finally gave up and was starting to feel her way to the front of the store when accidentally she touched something hard—the cover of the book. She remembered then that she had laid it on the nearest counter as she stepped into the phone booth.

This bit of good fortune enabled her to wait patiently another hour. She was very hungry, very tired. Then, too, the store was getting cold.

Christine wondered whether she would have to spend the night in this place, debated whether the proprietor would arrest her—or have her arrested—if she ate some of his groceries—say some of the canned food he had on display in his window. Or she might smash a window and climb out. Most any storekeeper would be angry to have his windows broken, but if Uncle Stanley paid him, it might be all right.

Christine stopped planning and jumped to her feet. Hadn't a car rolled past? A familiar car—Edith's car?

Heedless of the stack of canned food arranged in neat pyramids in the window, Christine tried to reach the glass. Down came the pyramids, striking her on the shoulders and feet as she cried, "Edith! Edith! I'm in here!"

The lights of the car had disappeared, before Christine found herself next to the pane, but she waited tensely, hoping against hope that Edith would drive past again.

Her face pressed against the glass, she stared up and down the street. Presently she saw the gleam of headlights—a car was coming. Chris-

tine snatched up a small can and began to hammer on the glass. Fortunately it was thick and would stand considerable pounding.

"Edith! Edith!" Christine kept calling, quite unaware that she was crying from cold and excitement and the fear of being disappointed again.

The car came abreast of the store—it was traveling slowly—it rolled more slowly—it stopped!

A man stepped out—Uncle Stanley! A woman followed him—Edith! They had both come for her.

"I can't get out!" cried Christine, realizing her predicament anew.

Uncle Stanley was rattling the door as though he meant to shake it open.

"It's locked!" Christine repeated.

Edith put her bright face against the glass.

"Can't you open the door?" she called.

Christine shook her head.

"Who owns the store? Where does he live?" asked Edith loudly, while Uncle Stanley continued to rattle the door.

"Mr. Jingle. I don't know where he lives!" shouted Christine.

Edith said something to Uncle Stanley. She pointed up the street. He seemed to argue with her, then suddenly turned on his heel and hurried off.

"He'll get some one," Edith cried encouragingly.

It was hard work to shout back and forth and while they waited, the girls didn't try to say much to each other. In a few moments Uncle Stanley was back, a surprised looking man with him.

Curiosity almost consumed Christine as the three stood with their heads close together, talking. What could they be saying? Suppose they decided she would have to stay all night and all day Sunday in this store? If Uncle Stanley were very much put out—and something told Christine he was—he might *make* her stay here just to punish her. The street light flickered uncertainly and all three of the faces were in shadow. They must be arguing—yes, Uncle Stanley was arguing. Then he took out his wal-

let and wrote something on a card and gave it to the man—Christine watched the man pull out his spectacles and adjust them with maddening deliberateness; then he read the card slowly, folded it and put it in his pocket.

From another pocket he drew a key—at last he was going to open the door! Then he paused and said something to Edith.

"Don't let the cat out!" Edith cried through the glass.

Christine nodded to show she heard and understood. She picked the cat up in her arms and carefully made her way out of the window, no small feat in the dim light and with rolling cans constantly getting under her feet. But she made the door safely and as it opened a crack, she thrust kitty behind her.

"Don't let the cat out!" the man warned her solemnly.

"I won't—let me out," Christine urged, slipping through and closing the door with a bang that did not, she hoped, nip the cat's whiskers.

"Darling, you must be starved! And how cold

your hands are!" cried Edith, putting her warm arms around her.

The man was locking the door and now tried it to make sure it was fastened.

"How come you got in there?" he asked suspiciously.

Christine explained, but in the midst of her explaining, her teeth began to chatter.

"Stop making her talk!" said Edith indignantly. "Stan, drive us where we can get something to eat—Christine has a chill and she'll be sick if we don't take a little care of her."

Uncle Stanley helped them into the car and started the engine.

"Probably everything in town is closed," he said. "It's late."

CHAPTER XXIV

EXPLANATIONS

CHRISTINE wondered how late it was. She was huddled between Edith and Uncle Stanley and couldn't pull her arm out to look at her wrist watch. It had probably stopped, she reflected, for she usually wound it at half-past seven, the time she started to study. To-night she had forgotten and the little watch would have stopped, of course.

"It's after eleven," said Uncle Stanley's vexed voice. "I think we'd better drive straight home, Edith; everything is closed in these small towns."

After eleven! Christine scarcely heard Edith and Uncle Stanley arguing, so amazed was she to learn of the time. Why, it was almost Sunday morning! She must have been in that store for hours and hours, before they came for her.

Evidently Edith had accepted Uncle Stanley's suggestion, for the car sped through the night,

making no detour even when the lights of a drug store gleamed red and green in one town through which they passed.

Very few houses had lights in them and they met few cars. Uncle Stanley drove, though it was Edith's car—Christine had identified it correctly at her first glance. Edith chafed Christine's hands and tried to warm them and held her close. Once she whispered, "I know why you went to Tarryville," and once she whispered, "I love you."

Christine grew drowsy and she was dozing when the car turned into the familiar drive. She woke with a start to see Uncle Barry and Cousin Lo and Amelia and Carolina, all peering anxiously from the side door. It seemed to Christine that, without meaning to, she gave this household a good deal of anxiety.

Uncle Stanley lifted her down and she went up the steps, feeling more tired than she ever had in her life. She felt something in her hand and looked down. There was the book.

"I got it!" she said with a crooked little smile

that was oddly pathetic. "It's the other volume, Uncle Barry—you know, your first edition."

"You look sick, child," Cousin Lo had never spoken to Christine in that voice before. "You must be tuckered out; Stanley, I'm going to put Christine to bed. Anything you have to say can wait—it's nearly midnight now."

Christine dimly heard Edith explaining that she had had nothing to eat; she heard Cousin Lo giving directions to Carolina and to Amelia; Uncle Barry said something about his book, but Christine didn't know what it was. All she could think of was that she had to climb those stairs before she could go to bed.

"Here, I'll take her," Uncle Stanley announced and to Christine's astonishment, he lifted her up and carried her up to her room, depositing her in the center of her heavenly soft bed.

"What *are* we going to do with you?" he said, speaking more to himself than to her, as he stood looking down at her a moment.

Christine didn't know when he went away nor when Cousin Lo came in with Amelia, but all the time they were giving her a warm bath and

watching her drink the warm milk Carolina presently brought up and which was all she ought to have, Cousin Lo said, Christine was lost in surprise; Cousin Lo seemed such a totally different woman! Her face and voice and hands were so gentle, she seemed so loving—there was magic in her hands as she helped Christine undress and when she tucked her into bed after the bath.

"I wish she was like this all the time," thought the sleepy Christine, drifting off to the land of Nod as comfortably as though she had never been locked in an empty store.

When she woke, she found sunshine streaming into her room and Amelia standing at the foot of the bed watching her.

"I was thinking it was about time you woke up, Miss Christine," said Amelia in her soft voice. "Dinner's going to be ready in a half hour; you all must be mighty hungry. Mr. Barry was saying he hoped you could come down to dinner when Miss Patchem and Mr. Stanley get back from church."

"Is it dinner time?" Christine sat up with a

jerk. "*Dinner* time? Have I slept till one o'clock?"

Amelia nodded. It was, she explained, twenty-five minutes of one. Did Miss Christine want her to help her dress?

Christine laughed.

"I'm not sick," she declared. "I was tired last night, that was all. No, thank you, Amelia, I'll be quite all right. Tell Uncle Barry I'm coming down as soon as I've dressed."

As she dressed, Christine wondered whether Uncle Stanley was still "cross." She ought, of course, to have left word where she was going. Still, she had expected to be back—how could she know, reasoned Christine, that Tarryville was so far away?

She went down to the study a little shyly. Uncle Barry was there alone, reading. He greeted her with a smile and held out his hands.

"I don't know yet how you got hold of that book, but you have a marvelously accurate memory, Christine," he said warmly. "I never really expected to own both volumes. How am

I going to be able to scold you for turning the house upside down?"

Christine perched on the arm of his chair.

"Don't scold," she begged. "I'm sorry, Uncle Barry. I didn't know some one would have to come and get me."

The trouble was, Uncle Barry pointed out, that she never told any one, never asked permission. Any member of a household owed it, as a matter of courtesy, to consult the convenience of others.

"There isn't any one to tell," said Christine obstinately.

"Yesterday you were ill and Cousin Lo was out and Uncle Stanley was away. Besides, I meant to come right back."

Uncle Barry sighed. He might have said something more, but Uncle Stanley and Cousin Lo came in from church just then and Edith was with them.

She kissed Christine affectionately and Amelia announced dinner. Christine realized how hungry she was. Since noon time the day before she had had only a little warm milk—why, she

was starving then and there and no wonder!

Cousin Lo, she perceived at the dinner table, had returned to her old manner. Cousin Lo scolded about Winks, worried over the service of the dinner, tried persistently to bring up the subject of Christine's absence. She seemed like an entirely different woman from the tender, sympathetic person who had been so gentle to Christine the night before.

Edith adroitly steered the conversation away from unpleasant topics; it was thanks to her that the meal passed off pleasantly and every one enjoyed Carolina's roast lamb and famous mint sauce and her "best" Sunday dessert, an apricot shortcake.

"Now let's hear the history of the book," said Uncle Stanley quietly, as they rose from the table.

Edith sat down on the divan in the study and pulled Christine down beside her. Her attitude was protective and Uncle Stanley frowned a little as he saw it.

"Edith told me how you found the book in the antique shop," he said, "but what ever made you

go to Tarryville, Christine? And how could you get locked in that store?"

Christine explained, from the beginning. She told the whole story, from the time she had found the name of Mint in the directory, until she stepped out of the telephone booth to find the store deserted and locked up for the night.

"I think it might have kept open till ten o'clock," she finished resentfully. "The stores in Harrington do, on Saturday night. Farmers drive in to buy things."

Uncle Stanley explained that Mr. Jingle's store was comparatively small, and the proprietor was an elderly man, stone deaf. They had had trouble finding who owned the store and then they couldn't wake the man up!

"We finally got hold of his nephew and he was suspicious," said Uncle Stanley. "He wasn't going to unlock the store and release you until he had had time to take an inventory of stock and see whether anything was missing. I thought Edith would choke when he said that!"

"He was so stupid and mean!" scolded Edith. "As if Christine would touch any of his uncle's

stuff. He was perfectly willing to let the poor child spend the night in that dreadful place, if he thought he could prove she had helped herself to a spool of thread."

"Don't be unjust," Uncle Stanley reproved. "The man couldn't know *why* Christine was there—I gave him my card and told him I'd be responsible for any damage he might discover later and that appeased him."

"I told you to stay in the house," said Cousin Lo stiffly. "All this might have been avoided, if you had been willing to obey. And then, when you found yourself in this store, why didn't you telephone your own home? Why must you upset Mrs. Foster?"

Christine looked worriedly at Edith.

"Was that your mother? She could hear me, but I couldn't hear her," she said. "I'm sorry if I upset her; I wanted to ask you to come and get me."

"Of course you did," Edith put one hand over Christine's. "I know just how you felt. I would have come in a moment, only I wasn't home. Stan and I stayed for dinner in Warner; we

almost went to the theater, too. Now I'm glad we came out on an earlier train. Mother didn't know what to do and she and Cousin Lo were telephoning back and forth between the houses when Stan and I reached the house."

"You haven't answered my question, Christine," said Cousin Lo. "Why didn't you telephone to me, or to your Uncle Barry?"

Christine flushed. She looked appealingly at Uncle Barry.

"You had a headache," she told him. "And —and—Cousin Lo always scolds first."

"Some one has to," said Uncle Stanley grimly. "After this, Christine, you are not to go anywhere without leaving word. I think you're old enough to understand it is important we know where you are: we all, in homes and offices, everywhere, think it only sensible and businesslike to leave word where we may be found. In your case you can't dash around the country whenever the fancy seizes you; you might have had a serious argument with those two strange women. It would have been better in every way to

have waited and asked some one to go with you."

"They would have sold the book!" Christine defended herself earnestly. "They had a rare book catalogue on the table, Uncle Stanley. They were looking up prices, I know they were!"

That didn't alter the situation, Uncle Stanley said firmly. In the end, because Uncle Barry and Edith, too, asked her, and because she was honest enough to admit the justice of the argument, Christine promised not to undertake another expedition, without first consulting some one older.

Two or three days later she came in from school to find the study door closed, a rare occurrence in the daytime. Usually it stood wide open and Uncle Barry liked every one to drop in as they went up or down stairs.

"Is that you, Christine?" asked Cousin Lo, coming out of the living room as Christine put her books on the hall table.

"Don't go near the study—your Uncle Stanley is in a bad way and Barry is talking to him. Edith's broken the engagement and sent him back his ring!"

CHAPTER XXV

TROUBLED WATERS

COUSIN LO, Christine told herself, always took the gloomiest view of a situation. Uncle Stanley and Edith had differed before: they would be on friendly terms again in a few days.

But a week went by, two weeks. Uncle Stanley, silent, curt, appeared only at breakfast and dinner. Edith never came to the house. Christine wondered whether the incident of her trip to Tarryville could by any chance have precipitated a quarrel: Edith, perhaps, had taken Christine's part against Uncle Stanley.

She asked Uncle Barry timidly.

"No, no," he said kindly. "Nothing like that, child. We'll hope this break isn't permanent, but Stan and Edith are both determined strong-willed folk and I'm afraid they'll hurt each other pretty badly before they learn common sense."

Christine couldn't altogether understand, but she sensed the undercurrent of unhappiness in the house. Uncle Stanley's eyes were haggard. Cousin Lo couldn't seem to stop herself from mentioning Edith's name and each time she did she stopped and looked embarrassed and then rushed to fill in the pause, so that she made every one uncomfortable.

"Oh, dear, I don't see why things have to be like this," worried Christine, wishing she could see Edith—though for some reason she shrank from going to her house.

"If she wants me, she'll call up," thought Christine.

Then Jane Pine, who faithfully "called" for Christine every school morning, met her one bright day, fairly bursting with news.

"What do you know!" said Jane and without waiting for a reply she added, "Haven't you heard?"

Christine, trying to remember whether she had put her English paper in her rhetoric, or left it upstairs on her table, paid little attention to Jane's remarks. Jane was always excited about

something and whatever she had to tell she would tell without urging.

"Edith Foster is going to take Miss Allison's place!" said Jane. "We're going on with home economics, starting to-morrow."

"Edith!" repeated Christine incredulously. "Edith isn't a teacher."

Jane nodded her red head insistently.

"Yes, she is!" she answered. "Didn't you know that? She specialized in domestic science and she wanted to teach, but your uncle didn't like it. Everybody says they're not engaged any more, so I suppose Edith is going to teach. It will be fun to have her in the practice house, won't it? She is awfully sweet."

Edith teaching domestic science! Edith taking Miss Allison's place! Christine's mind was in a whirl. Uncle Stanley wouldn't like it, and it must mean that Edith didn't intend to marry him, ever.

The news had spread over the school—Miss Allison wasn't coming back before spring—the Board of Education didn't want the home economics course interrupted so long—Miss Foster

was going to teach the girls. The building fairly buzzed with chatter.

"Christine, can't you do something about Ramona Haddon?" Miss Gurth suggested, meeting Christine in the corridor between periods.

"I don't think she's at all happy or contented: she ought to be in school. Now that Miss Foster's taking the practice house, don't you think you can persuade Ramona to come back and behave herself?"

"I don't think she likes me very well," Christine murmured uncomfortably.

Miss Gurth said that had nothing to do with it.

"Probably Ramona is only waiting to be coaxed a bit," said the teacher. "You girls can help her and you're the only ones who can."

That afternoon, passing Miss Allison's office, on the ground floor, Christine saw Edith sitting at the desk. In a brown tailored frock she looked very lovely and very competent.

"Hello, Honey," she greeted Christine without embarrassment. "I've been meaning to call you up, but this new job has kept me busy: I see from

the records that you're going to be one of my girls."

Christine went in and stood by the desk. She couldn't keep her eyes from Edith's left hand, and though she tried desperately to think of something to say the words didn't come.

"Every one all right at home?" said Edith lightly.

"Ye-s," Christine answered. "Yes, every one's all right. Uncle Stanley is cross——" she stopped in some confusion.

Edith raised her blue, blue eyes and Christine saw in them the same unhappy look that she had seen in Uncle Stanley's dark ones when he thought no one observed him.

"It's the same old argument, Christine," said Edith, making marks on a paper with a blue pencil. "Stan and I can never agree. He thinks his first duty is to make Cousin Lo happy."

Christine not knowing what to say, said nothing. One of the other teachers came in. Christine withdrew, wondering whether Uncle Stanley knew that Edith had taken Miss Allison's place.

"Gosh — goodness," — Christine remembered that Uncle Barry objected to "Gosh," and she liked to please him, "Goodness, I don't know what I'm going to do about Ramona."

Obviously the first thing to do was to see her. In cold weather Ramona clung tenaciously to the warm house and could hardly ever be coaxed out to walk or play. Christine, having left her books at home and reported to an approving Cousin Lo that she was going to see Ramona, walked slowly around to the Haddons' house.

Ramona was home. She was obviously bored, too, and she seemed glad to have Christine to talk to. She asked a good many questions about school and when she heard that Edith Foster was substituting for Miss Allison, she did not try to conceal her curiosity. Why did Edith want to teach? Didn't she intend to marry Christine's uncle? What did the girls say? Was she a good teacher?

"I don't know,"—Christine seized on the last question. "We're going to start using the practice house again to-morrow. Why don't you come back and go on with the class, Ramona?"

Ramona's lips set in the familiar, obstinate line.

"I will not be a servant!" she flared.

"No, but you're willing to be a dub!" The exasperated Christine retorted. "If you'd stick your week out, you'd know something about cooking and, what you seem to forget, you'll have a chance for one of the other jobs. Besides, what about the rest of us? Don't we have to be cook for a week, too?"

Ramona wavered. In her heart she was anxious to go back to school. She was very lonely and she missed the other girls. But her pride wouldn't allow her to give in.

"Suppose I ask Edith to let me be waitress and work with you?" finally Christine proposed.

She knew that Miss Gurth would never consent to releasing Ramona from her "cook job," as the girls called it; she would have to finish her week at that post. But there was really no reason why, if she asked, Christine should not be waitress for that week; most of the girls disliked that task, because it involved getting up from the table, or sometimes waiting till the meal was

nearly over, before they were allowed to sit down.

"Well, all right," conceded Ramona rather grandly. "I don't mind coming back—if you'll be the waitress and help with the dishes and everything."

Christine trudged home, scolding herself all the way.

"There you'll be, shut up in the kitchen with Ramona who never did and never will do her part!" she fretted. "And it was nicer in school without her, you know it was. Oh, dear, I think this is a very disappointing world: Ramona is coming back and Edith and Uncle Stanley have quarreled and every one in the house is as cross as two sticks!"

This wasn't strictly accurate: Winks wasn't cross. He fell upon Christine with barks of delight and as they went up the steps together, Uncle Barry opened the door.

"Is this music day?" asked Christine in some confusion. "Oh, I must be late. I'm so sorry, Uncle Barry; I went to see Ramona."

She followed him into the living room and held

out her hands to the fire blazing merrily in the fireplace.

"You have a wrinkle between your eyes, child," said Uncle Barry, taking his accustomed chair near the piano. "Not worrying are you, Christine?"

Christine sat down on the piano bench and absently arranged her music on the rack.

"Did you know that Edith Foster is taking Miss Allison's place in school, Uncle Barry?" she asked.

"No, I didn't know it, but I'm not surprised," he answered. "Will you be in her class, Christine?"

"She's home economics," explained Christine. "She has the practice house, I mean; yes, I'll be in her class and so will Ramona Haddon, worse luck."

Christine's hands dropped to the keys.

"I think I'm tired of trying to understand people," she sighed, and began to play.

The lesson didn't go well. Uncle Barry was patience itself, but he never excused poor work. He made Christine play one page over six con-

secutive times and when she lost her temper, merely turned his back on her until she wiped her eyes and seemed ready to go on.

When at last she could go up to her room, Christine thought that what she would really like to do would be to send word down that she had a headache and didn't want any dinner. The drawback to this high and mighty procedure was that she didn't have a headache and she did want something to eat: also Uncle Stanley might question her absence.

"Is Edith going to teach in the High School, Christine?" asked Cousin Lo at the dinner table.

Christine dared not glance toward Uncle Stanley.

"Yes," she mumbled. "She's taking Miss Allison's place."

"Mrs. Haddon telephoned me, but I couldn't believe it," chattered Cousin Lo. "I don't know what the Fosters are thinking of—with all their money. Girls in my day stayed home and helped their mothers till they were married."

Christine stirred uneasily. No wonder Edith didn't want to live in the same house with Cousin

Lo, if this was the latter's idea of a tactful conversation.

"I should think you'd feel queer, too," persisted Cousin Lo.

"I feel queer—why?" Christine looked up from her salad.

"Well, you're Stanley's niece——" even Cousin Lo could interpret the look Uncle Stanley sent her from his place at the head of the table.

"Lo, did the laundry come to-day?" asked Uncle Barry, aware that the constant feud between Cousin Lo and the laundryman would provide his blundering relative with a topic that, judicially encouraged, would last throughout the remainder of the meal.

Later in the evening, as Christine came downstairs to let Winks in, she inadvertently overheard Cousin Lo speaking to Uncle Barry in the study. The door was ajar, Cousin Lo's voice penetrating, and the mention of Christine's name arrested her attention.

"In a way it's too bad Christine came here to live, because it's broken up the engagement," said Cousin Lo in her positive way.

Christine stopped short.

"Why, Lo, what makes you say that?"—Uncle Barry expressed the surprise Christine felt.

"Well, Stanley never told me, nor Edith either, of course," said Cousin Lo, "but I'm quite certain what the trouble is: Edith isn't willing to marry Stanley and have the responsibility of a young, flighty girl thrust upon her. It would spoil Edith's home—you can see that."

Uncle Barry cleared his throat. Christine listened intently for his reply.

"I must say I can't see it at all," said Uncle Barry.

CHAPTER XXVI

RAMONA GIVES IN

THE next morning Ramona Haddon came back to school. Christine, walking with her at noon toward the practice house, scarcely heard her rather complaining chatter. She was turning over in her mind what Cousin Lo had said the night before.

For a brief half hour, Christine had really believed what Cousin Lo so evidently believed: that Edith had broken her engagement because she didn't want to have to live with Christine. Then the memory of Edith's kindness, her tenderness, reasserted itself: Christine recalled how often she had said she wished she had a little sister, how often she had coaxed Uncle Stanley to greater leniency in Christine's behalf. Edith's lovely, affectionate face, her truthful eyes, came before Christine. No, Cousin Lo was mistaken.

"And it makes me so furious," said Christine

to herself, the last thing before she fell asleep, "because I'll never be able to tell her the real reason why Edith won't marry Uncle Stanley. Cousin Lo is always so sure she's right!"

Yet, if Christine had stayed awake long enough to argue further with herself, she would have had to admit that she would hate to be the one to tell the true state of affairs to Cousin Lo; all that kept Cousin Lo from being pathetic was her self-esteem and no one would be unkind enough to wish to puncture that.

"Are you going to be waitress? Did you ask?" Ramona inquired eagerly.

"Miss Gurth said it was all right, if Edith didn't mind," replied Christine.

She was admonishing herself that she must remember to call Edith "Miss Foster," when they reached the practice house.

Frances and Dora and Sally had gone on ahead, and Jane Pine caught up with them, just as they reached the steps.

"Is Miss Foster good? Is she strict?" asked Frances Newcome in a loud whisper.

The door opened as Jane said "Sh!" and Edith Foster smiled at them.

Lovely, lovely—the six girls stared at her, for she was, as Sally said afterward "too pretty for words." She wore white from head to foot and her smile was distracting.

"We'll go on from your first lesson," she informed the girls competently, as soon as they were in the house.

"Here are the slips from which you're to draw —only five, for I understand from Miss Gurth that Ramona hasn't completed her first week yet."

That, thought Christine, was a tactful way of putting it.

"Miss Gurth said that if you didn't mind, it would be all right for me to be waitress," explained Christine, looking so earnest that only a very stupid person would have been unable to guess she had a special reason for choosing that "job."

Edith was far from stupid.

"Very well," she said, tearing up one of the slips. "Let the others draw."

This time Frances Newcome was "Visitor," Dora Berry the nurse, and Sally Morris "mother."

The first task, of course, was to eat lunch and clear it away. The meal was deliciously cooked —Edith had prepared it in advance. Most of the clearing up fell to Christine and Ramona and, just as the former had foreseen, Ramona shirked her share.

"Would you mind washing the dishes?" she asked Christine as soon as they found themselves alone in the kitchen. "I had a manicure last night and I like to keep my nails nice."

Christine looked at her own pretty nails. She took care of them herself and she also liked to keep them nice.

"Well, you're really supposed to wash the dishes," she said matter-of-factly, "but I suppose I can do them this once."

Ramona was languidly drying a vegetable dish, when Edith came out into the kitchen.

"Here, this is all wrong," she said immediately. "The waitress takes care of the linen and silver and puts it away; you are not to wash dishes,

Christine; your turn will come when you are cook."

"I don't see what difference it makes," argued Ramona. "I am working, too, just as hard as Christine."

"There are certain tasks that you're to learn as a matter of routine, Ramona," said Edith patiently. "Washing dishes is a part of the work of cook. Change places with Christine."

Ramona obeyed sullenly. As Edith turned to leave the kitchen she muttered something under her breath. Christine heard her distinctly.

"Just because she's a friend of yours, you favor her," muttered Ramona.

Edith heard, too. The famous Foster temper leaped into her blue eyes, but she controlled her tongue.

"If you can't keep strictly to your rôle of waitress, Christine, I shall have to shift you to another position," she announced firmly.

Ramona crashed the dishes angrily as she washed them and Christine dried and put them away. There was no time for further controversy, for they had to hurry back to school, but

Christine did not look forward to the afternoon with unalloyed pleasure.

"Ramona try to get you into trouble?" asked Jane significantly, as she and Christine met in the cloakroom at school.

"I think she tried to keep out of trouble herself," said Christine.

Three o'clock that afternoon found the girls back in the practice house. Two small children were there, "borrowed" from the Fresh Air Home, and Edith announced that several people were expected in for tea.

"I'll show you how to make sandwiches, Ramona, and Christine, you'll need to get the tea wagon ready," she said.

Ramona listened sullenly. Christine didn't see why she should hate the idea of being cook so bitterly—all the girls looked upon their training as a matter of course. Some one had to be cook and the cook in good time would be "lady of the house." It was perfectly fair.

"Open a jar of the crabapple jelly, Ramona," directed Edith. "And make the triangle sandwiches I showed you."

Some one called her out of the kitchen and Ramona attacked the innocent glass of jelly with such fury that Christine fully expected to see it fly into bits. She said as little as possible to Ramona, wisely reasoning that it would only make her crosser to argue, and, thanks to her own energy and efforts, tea was ready to serve when the company arrived.

Ramona again refused to come into the living room, but Christine, after serving very nicely, joined the group. She helped herself to a jelly sandwich and, as Sally Morris was coaxing one of her small charges to recite Mother Goose, Christine took a bite.

Something sharp cut her tongue!

Her one thought was to get out of the room before any one discovered she was in distress. Under cover of the applause that greeted the small elocutionist, Christine managed to reach the kitchen. She rushed to the sink and spit out her bit of sandwich.

"Is anything the matter?" Ramona asked, frightened.

Christine put her handkerchief to her tongue and brought it away red.

"Something in that sandwich cut my tongue!" she said painfully.

Ramona looked really frightened now.

"I chipped the jelly glass when I opened it," she confessed. "I couldn't see any glass, so I thought it must be all right. There was just one sliver off the rim, Christine—see I'll show you where."

She brought the glass—there was a single chipped place inside the rim. Christine let water run on the bread in the sink and sure enough a sliver of glass washed out.

"Maybe I'd better go and get the other sandwiches," she said anxiously, holding her handkerchief to her smarting tongue.

"That's the only piece of glass, I know it is," Ramona insisted. "Don't tell, will you, Christine? Miss Foster will be so angry; honestly I didn't mean to cut any one. Please don't tell."

"I'll say we want to bring in more sandwiches," decided Christine. "That will give me an excuse to get the plate."

She forced herself to enter the room leisurely and remove the plate casually—thank fortune, apparently no one else had found anything wrong with their refreshments. Christine thought it likely that Ramona had been right about the glass—there was but one chip. Still, it was too great a risk to run, to allow the other jelly sandwiches to be eaten.

The girls threw out the half dozen jelly sandwiches and substituted others of blackberry jam. When Christine returned from passing the replenished plate, Ramona eyed her imploringly.

"Is your tongue sore?" she asked. "Honestly, Christine, I am so sorry. I wouldn't have had it happen for—for anything. You're not going to tell, are you?"

Christine, like the small general she could be on occasions, saw her opportunity.

"Will you stop this silly business of saying you hate to be cook?" she demanded sternly. "Will you be sensible and come in with the rest and do your part and not spoil everything for everybody? Will you?"

"I'll do anything you want me to, if only you

won't say anything about the glass," promised Ramona.

"All right, then," Christine answered, speaking a little thickly for her tongue still hurt.

"You won't tell?"

"I won't tell."

"I wouldn't have told anyway," said Christine, chuckling a little to herself as she left Jane Pine at the corner and walked briskly toward her own house an hour later.

She saw a small, joyous body come hurtling toward her, heard Winks' yelp of pure delight—then ran forward blindly as a heavy touring car shot wildly up the street leaving a still little form in the center of the road.

"Winks! Winks!" Christine did not know she cried the dog's name aloud as she ran.

She crouched down in the street and took the body on her lap. The faithful eyes opened, a pink tongue licked her hand feebly just once and Winks lay quite still.

"Christine!"—some one put an arm about her and lifted her to her feet. "Christine, dear!"

Uncle Stanley had his arm about her, Uncle

Stanley was looking at her with tears standing unashamed in his eyes.

"Winks," said Christine. It was all she seemed able to say.

"I know—I saw it from upstairs," her uncle answered. "The car didn't stop. Let me help you carry him in, Christine."

CHAPTER XXVII

STRAIGHTENED OUT

"CRY a little, Christine. Don't be afraid to cry."

"I can't cry," said Christine.

She had laid across the foot of her bed all evening. She had not been able to eat dinner. She wanted to be left alone. Uncle Stanley had talked to her. Uncle Barry had talked to her. Christine had listened with the feeling that it didn't matter what they said; she wished they would go away and leave her alone.

Uncle Stanley stood looking down at her now —he had been kindness and patience itself; even when she had been rude to him, because something hurt her so much it seemed to her she must hurt some one else, he had not minded.

"What's the matter with Christine?" asked Cousin Lo, coming into the room.

Cousin Lo had spent the day with Mrs. Had-

don and had stayed for dinner. Mr. Haddon had just brought her home and, surprised to find the lower floor of the house deserted, she had walked up here, to find Christine lying face down on the bed and her two uncles watching her distractedly.

Uncle Stanley told her in a low voice what had happened.

"She hasn't had anything to eat," added Uncle Barry.

Christine hoped they would all go away. She was relieved when she heard Cousin Lo rustle out of the room—the two uncles must have followed her, for the room was very still

Winks—Winks—Winks—only the familiar, foolish little name danced through Christine's tired brain. Such a dear little dog, such a loving little dog!

Oh, dear, her door was opening again. If one more person teased her to eat, told her to cry, she would throw a book at them!

The bed creaked as Cousin Lo sat down beside her.

"Christine dear, sit up just a moment," said

Cousin Lo's voice, a compassionate kind, understanding voice now.

Christine struggled to a sitting position. Her eyes were hot and dry. She pushed the hair off her forehead with a weary little gesture.

"Uncle Stanley has something for you," said Cousin Lo calmly.

Uncle Stanley leaned over the foot of the bed and put something into Christine's hands. Something soft and silky, warm and cuddling. Something with four white paws and helpless, appealing brown eyes.

"It's a collie pup," explained Cousin Lo. "Its mother died last night; you'll have to bring it up on a bottle, Christine."

The puppy whimpered and crept closer to Christine.

"See how little and helpless he is," went on Cousin Lo, in her understanding voice. "He *needs* you, Christine."

The ache in Christine's heart swelled, her throat hurt. She stroked the puppy gently, half-heartedly gathered him up to put him on the

floor—and burst into a flood of tears that shook her body from head to foot.

The uncles went away and Cousin Lo gathered her into her arms.

"That's right, darling," she whispered. "Cry the sorrow out."

Christine did cry. She cried until she was exhausted and Cousin Lo made no effort to check her, while the puppy licked her hands and snuggled against her frantically.

Her eyes swollen, feeling limp and as tired as though she had walked miles, Christine finally lay silent against Cousin Lo's shoulder.

"Now you'll sleep," said Cousin Lo contentedly.

She bathed Christine's face and eyes, helped her to undress, tucked her into bed as though she had been a child. She went downstairs and brought up a tray of food and watched Christine eat it. She went downstairs again and brought up a box for the puppy to sleep in—he could sleep, she said, beside Christine's bed.

"My dog was killed when I was a little girl, and I never got over it," she said as she folded a

piece of flannel to make a soft lining for the box.

"If some one had given me another dog to love it would have helped me to bear the loneliness."

Christine slept late the next morning. She lay quiet, when she discovered she was already too late for school. Some one had taken the puppy away, for the box beside the bed was empty.

"Ready for breakfast, Christine?" Cousin Lo tapped at the door.

Christine, answering that she wasn't dressed, was informed that her breakfast would be served in bed. Half an hour later, dressing with unaccustomed deliberateness, following her dainty tray breakfast, Christine discovered that a bit of lace on a cuff needed tacking. Her basket lacked ecru thread—she would have to borrow from Cousin Lo.

The door of Cousin Lo's room stood partly open—Christine peeked in and before she could withdraw or rap, Cousin Lo, seated at her dressing table had seen her. Cousin Lo, who was

gazing into the mirror and crying as though her heart would break.

"What *is* the matter?" Christine took a step forward, alarmed and horrified beyond measure. She had never seen Cousin Lo cry. She didn't know that grown-up people ever cried like this.

"Nothing," said Cousin Lo, crying harder than ever.

Christine went to her and put her arms around her.

"Tell me," she urged. "Can't I do *something?*"

"I suppose I'm a perfect fool," wept Cousin Lo, mopping her poor red eyes. "But I'm so unhappy; Mrs. Haddon wants me to come and live with her as her companion. And I know my duty and I will not be so ungrateful as to desert those who need me. I've never given away like this before, Christine—it's only when I think how happy I could be, that I break down."

The amazed Christine coaxed the story from her bit by bit. Cousin Lo wanted more than anything else in the world, to live with Mrs.

Haddon—to be a companion for her, nurse her in her frequent illnesses, keep house for her. Mrs. Haddon wanted her very much, would pay her a fair salary and they would be like sisters.

Yet Cousin Lo declared that duty prevented her from accepting this arrangement. Her cousins needed her. Her place was with them. Even if Uncle Stanley should patch up his difference with Edith Foster and marry her, Cousin Lo would be needed—Edith couldn't take charge of a large house and run it as it should be run. No, Cousin Lo must stay and, she assured Christine, she meant to do her duty cheerfully. She would be all right after she had bathed her eyes. She was very grateful to Stanley and Barry and she meant to devote her life to keeping them comfortable and happy.

All the rest of that day Christine thought furiously. She spent most of the time in her room, for Cousin Lo was busy, Uncle Barry suffering from one of his headaches. She certainly had enough to think about, Christine admitted: Cousin Lo's reasoning still amazed her, after half a day of contemplation.

Christine was looking out of the window when Uncle Stanley came home in the late afternoon. Something in the droop of his broad shoulders decided her. She knew what she meant to do. Putting the silver and sable puppy carefully into his box, she went swiftly downstairs. She knew where Uncle Stanley would be—in the study. He would be alone, too, because Uncle Barry was in his own room.

Christine rapped at the study door.

"Come in"—Uncle Stanley looked fagged out, but he smiled at her across the big desk.

"How's the puppy dog?" he asked genially.

"He's lovely," said Christine and sat down in one of the big chairs.

"I may be making a mistake, Uncle Stanley," she said earnestly, without preamble, "but I think things are in a muddle and if I can straighten them out, why shouldn't I? I want to tell you about Cousin Lo—and about Edith."

Uncle Stanley frowned. He twisted a paper in his hands, and for one moment Christine thought he would refuse to listen. Then——

"Fire away," he said quietly.

Christine remembered her promise to Edith that she would not tell what she had been told on that drive to the antique shop. But she reasoned that Uncle Stanley must know Edith's feelings in the matter, so it was only necessary to tell him what she had learned from Cousin Lo.

She began in a soft little rush of words and found the telling easier than she had expected. She explained how Cousin Lo felt, how much she wanted to live with Mrs. Haddon; she told Uncle Stanley everything Cousin Lo had told her and how she had cried.

"So if she *wants* to live with Mrs. Haddon," finished Christine triumphantly, "won't everything be all right? You and Edith can—I mean she will—well, anyway, you can be happy, can't you, Uncle Stanley?"

He looked at her strangely.

"Trying to help us, aren't you, dear?" he said kindly. "Well, I wish it could all be as simply mended as you think, Christine. Unfortunately, Miss Foster no longer loves me. It wouldn't make any difference about Cousin Lo now. Don't bother your pretty head over us."

Christine gazed at him pitifully.

"I didn't mean to tell you this," she said slowly. "Edith wouldn't like me to; but how can I help it, when she is so unhappy and you won't try to understand? Once, a long time ago, Edith told me that she loved you more than life itself—she said that, Uncle Stanley."

A little frightened at what she had done, Christine stopped abruptly. The room was very still.

"I think I'll telephone," said Uncle Stanley, after what seemed a long silence.

He went out to the hall, closing the door behind him. Christine waited in the big chair. She thought about Edith as she sat there; would Edith blame her, had she made her unhappier, when she only wanted to help?

"It is very hard to know what to do," said Christine, half aloud.

She remembered this room the first time she had seen it—not so long ago, as months were counted, but a good deal had happened since that first day. She loved the room now—this whole house was home to her. She loved Uncle

Barry—she was beginning to love poor bewildered Cousin Lo. As for Uncle Stanley——

Just at that moment the door opened and Uncle Stanley came into the study. He walked straight to Christine and took both her hands, pulling her gently to her feet.

"Christine!" he said gravely, though his eyes were filled with laughter, "Christine, I am to ask you whether you would like to be maid of honor at a Christmas wedding!"

And Christine's answer, though brief, seemed to be completely satisfactory.

"I can wear high-heeled slippers!" she cried.

THE END